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SUDDENLY A STRONG ARM WAS THROWN AROUND HER.

The Three Sisters; or, The Mystery of Lord Chalfont.

BY ALICE FLEMING.

PROLOGUE.

It was only a dull, quiet house, one of a suburban row designated by the pretentious name of a terrace; yet the first act of a tragedy that was destined to blight one life, if not more, was about to be played there. The tall, handsome woman who sat in the little, simply-furnished draw-

ing-room, clad in a plainly-made black dress, with no ornament but the coil chain around her neck, which her hands kept restlessly twisting and twirling, had nothing tragic in her surroundings; but there was a hectic spot on either cheek, and a far-away look in her somber eyes that whispered of thoughts of a more stormy character than her quiet, even listless attitude would have led any one to suppose.

The day came to a close, the room grew darker and darker, but she did not move to ring for lights till a key turned in the lock of the outer door, a foot ran briskly up the stairs, and a gentleman came in, stumbling over a chair that stood in his way.

"Con—I beg your pardon, Jane—I did not know you were there.

Touch the bell, please. I wish you shared my aversion for gloom and obscurity, and then you would not mope in the dark in this fashion."

A sulky-looking maid-servant brought in a lamp; and, as she set it on the table, she laid beside it a bill with missus's compliments, and she should be very thankful to have it settled.

The gentleman, who had been divesting himself of his great coat, nodded, and motioned her to leave the room. He pushed the bill from him as he seated himself, and glanced furtively at his companion. From a certain indefinable likeness it was evident that they were brother and sister.

"You are very silent to-night, Jane. Has this woman been harassing you for her money?"

"No; she is very civil, but I fancy she is poor."

"And finds it inconvenient to have lodgers who are in her own predicament. Well, she shall be paid."

"How?" queried Jane, curtly.

She was answered with a laugh that had not much mirth in it.

"Did you fancy that I was at the end of my resources? Nonsense, girl! Because one scheme fails, must all fail? You don't know the depth of my inventive powers!"

She did not reply, and her brother sat for some minutes pulling his mustache; but at last he cried, angrily, "Why do you glance at me so oddly, Jane? What ails you? Have you a fit of the blues?"

"I suppose so," she answered, drearily. "I know that I am very tired of our life. I wish with all my heart that poverty was our only crime!"

"Ours? *Mine*, you mean!" And his voice took a bitter tone. "You have no cause for self-reproach. You have but followed where I chose to lead."

But, when she made no reply, he grew irritable.

"Are you implying that you are dissatisfied with me? What for? Am I a worse man to-day than I was yesterday? When Fortune does me a good turn, don't I always share her favors with you? Would I not have made you a countess before now if—the luck hadn't been against us?"

Still she was silent, and, muttering an anathema on the incomprehensibility of women, he arose, lit a chamber candle, and was sauntering away, when his sister started up, and caught hold of his arm, her fine features working with agitation.

"Harry, you are not going out again to-night?"

"Indeed I am," he said, sharply; "I have an appointment."

"Then, don't keep it—for my sake, don't!" she urged. "I have good reason for wishing it."

"Chut! you don't know what you are saying! I must have money, or how are we to live? Would you have me hold back when it offered? Don't be foolish, Jane! This is a whim of yours—nothing more!"

"Harry," his sister exclaimed, with increasing excitement, "you asked me why I seemed so dull. I will tell you. This afternoon, tired with a long walk, I fell asleep, and dreamed—oh, Harry! I dreamed of our mother! I thought she came to me, and asked me, with a look that pierced my guilty soul, for her boy!"

"Pshaw, Jane! why persist in telling me this?" And he tried to break from her hold; but she clung to him, and insisted on being heard.

"I thought she reminded me that you were younger than I, and that your affection for me—you do love me, Harry!—gave me great influence with you. And then she asked me how I had employed that influence, and I sunk down at her feet, and hid my guilty face, and groaned in the agonies of a reproaching conscience, for I know that I have been your evil genius. I have fostered your ambition, raised no protest against plans and schemes that I knew to be wrong; lived with you on your successes at the gaming-table, and worn the trophies of your victims!"

As she spoke, she dragged the chain from her neck, and hurled it across the room; then went on in half-choked accents of entreaty, while he let his head droop on his breast:

"Is it too late to repair the evil I have done? Let us go abroad, Harry. I am talented; I will take pupils; I will work for you till you have retrieved your character, and—"

But here he stopped her.

"I am afraid it's gone too far, Jane. I am so involved that I can't free myself if I would. But let me go now, and we'll have another serious talk to-morrow."

"Why not now?" she cried. "Why not now? I cannot bear to let you leave me; for—call me foolish, superstitious, or what you will—there is a foreboding upon me of some misfortune."

He looked at her, first with surprise, then with some compassion for her increasing agitation.

"You are not well, my poor girl. Go to bed. I tell you that I must go out again. I have an appointment, which it would be madness, nay ruin, to neglect."

Still she would have detained him; but he was growing angry.

She had never been so troublesome before. This was the first time she had plagued him with her scruples of conscience and her ill-omened dreams.

Unclasping her hands, he put her back gently, but firmly, and went to his room, where she heard him moving about for several minutes, while she fretted over the futility of her appeal.

"I will not give up all hope yet," she said, at last; "will make one more effort. I will waylay him when he comes down-stairs again; in the name of our dead mother, will conjure him to remain at home; for something tells me that this night will be the turning point of his life and mine."

But when she heard him descending the stairs, and would have opened the door and met him, she found it impossible.

He had locked it outside, and she was a prisoner till the servant came and set her at liberty.

All that night, Jane Richardson sat shivering by the window, watching for her brother's return, but he came not. All through the following day, and two or three succeeding days, she watched and waited, growing sick with apprehension as the hours went by and brought no tidings of him.

To avert suspicion, she preserved her outward composure, and accounted to the people of the house for his absence by saying he had been suddenly called into the country, and would speedily return.

But at last the suspense became intolerable, and on pretense of taking a stroll, she sallied forth, her pale face and sunken eyes hidden behind a thick veil, to visit some of his favorite haunts, and make inquiries there.

But she had not gone far, when her route led her past a police-station. Three or four idlers were staring at a bill just posted up outside, and she, too, felt impelled to stay and read it. But the letters swam before her dilating eyes.

She saw the words, "Two Hundred Pounds Reward," coupled with the name of Henry Richardson; while lower down there was something about the Earl of Chalfont, and—oh, sentence of fearful import!—*supposed to have been murdered*.

Retaining her senses by actual force of will, Jane Richardson turned and went back to her lodgings, followed, though she knew it not, by a policeman in plain clothes.

Her forebodings had been realized; that night had been pregnant with terrible events, and the misdeeds of the past were rising in array against her!

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE SISTERS.

"ARE you asleep, Jack?"

A sound between a sigh and a yawn, and then comes the reply.

"Yes—no; betwixt and between. Wide awake if you want me; if not, why, leave me to repose."

"Oh, do say something!" entreats the first speaker; "or I see ghosts. I've heard them rustling behind the wainscot ever since it began to grow dark."

Thus adjured, a girl, tall, slender, and raven-haired—this is all that can be distinguished in the twilight—leaves the narrow, old-fashioned bay window, on whose broad seat she had been curled up, and joins two other girls, graceful and dusky-tressed like herself, who for the last hour have been sitting in a similar bay.

They have been dreamily gazing at the lurid cloud in the west, behind which the sun has hid itself; or else watching the rain, that, after falling steadily all day long, is now with its gray mists shutting out the still grayer sea that lies about half a mile away.

"It isn't an enlivening prospect, is it?" observes Jacqueline Travers, as she stands between her sisters, with a hand on the shoulder of either.

"It's horrid!" ejaculates Nella, with emphasis.

"But it must be lovely when the sun shines!" a softer, sweeter voice interposes. "See how the ground slopes between the two crags, or cliffs, that shelter us so nicely! It appears to descend gradually from our lawn—"

"Lawn! You hear her! She said *lawn*!" echoed Jacqueline, addressing an imaginary audience. "Allow me to explain to you, my friends, that by this term Miss Claire Travers alludes to the fine patch of thistles, grousel, and such like, growing so luxuriantly in front of these windows! Oh, that we were akin to the pretty little rabbits—so engaging in their habits—that we might be able to appreciate such vegetation! As it is, I decline to call it a lawn. It wouldn't be truthful, and I can't do it."

"Ours will be a lovely garden when we have put it in order," her sister persisted; "and when those trees are pruned that interfere with the view, it will be charming—on a fine day, I mean."

"Question: Are there any fine days in this part of England? Answered with a quotation from my diary!" and Jacqueline pretended to mark off the paragraphs on her fingers.

"Monday: Arrived here in the midst of a thunder-storm. Tuesday: The storm changed to a drizzle. Wednesday: The drizzle was of a doubtful character, sometimes a little less, sometimes a little more. To-day it has been a steady, heartlessly cold, dispiriting downpour. There! Those are our experiences of the weather ever since we arrived on the Dorsetshire coast, at—at— What do you call this place? What is the name of our new home, Claire?"

"Call it The Dolefuls!" said Nella, with a groan.

"Papa says it is only known as The Cottage," Claire explained. "One of the Earls of Chalfont, an ancestor of him to whom the property now belongs, built it for a favorite sister, who was in delicate health, and liked to retire here when the great house, as they call The Priory, was full of visitors. After her death, however, he took a dislike to the place, which his son and grandson seem to have inherited, for The Priory has been let for some years to strangers, and this pretty little cottage would have gone to decay if a couple of old servants had not been allowed to reside in it."

"Did the Earl's sister die here?" asked Nella. "In which room, I wonder? If I could be sure that it was in mine, I would never sleep there again!"

"Of course she died here!" said Jacqueline. "And so shall we three, if no one comes to our relief speedily. We shall be found in interesting attitudes, after having perished of starvation!"

"Don't be so absurd, Jack!" cried Nella, crossly. "You turn everything into a jest."

"What is there absurd, my child, in reminding you that it's two miles to the village by the fields and three by the road, and that an-

other such day as this will bring us to the end of our supplies, without the possibility of replenishing them? And this reminds me that we had better scuffle off to bed instant, for we haven't any candles left, and only a match apiece."

Nella shivered.

"Oh, don't say that, Jack! I shall not dare to shut my eyes in this lonely place if I am not able to burn a light!"

"How logical!" quote Jacqueline, satirically. "As the light can be of no use to you, who always sleep like a dormouse, I suppose you want it for the benefit of the burglars you hear coming whenever a door creaks? Of course, it's only civil to save them the annoyance of stumbling over anything in the dark; but it's great waste of tallow!"

"If you prophesy such dreadful things, I shall not be able to go to bed at all!" cried Nella, almost in tears. "Three days have we been here, and not seen a creature but the old couple who have been in charge; and they are so old, so very old, that whenever I meet them I find myself thinking that I would rather die young than live to be so toothless, decrepit, and ugly as they are!"

"Moral reflection, number one!" said Jacqueline. "Spare us, number two, for your remarks are not enlivening, my love. I hope to live to be old without being ugly. I have a presentiment that I shall be a charming old lady!"

"It will be fine to-morrow," Claire predicted, "and then we shall be able to explore our domains. There is a famous orchard behind the house, and Mrs. Lane tells me the bay is considered very picturesque, and—"

"And it rains as much as ever!" interrupted Nella, disconsolately. "With that ceaseless 'drip! drip!' in one's ears, who could be cheerful?"

"Contentment sore
Long time she bore!"

Jacqueline quoted. "But, no; that's not right, is it? Now, it's a very strange fact that little bits of poetry are continually popping into my head. I'm sure I could repeat every familiar phrase from Shakspeare; and yet, somehow, they always mix themselves up, and glide off my tongue in a muddle. For instance, that quotation proved singularly *mal apropos*, because Nella is not contented, nor anything like it."

"It is so very lonely here," pleaded Nella.

"Well," said Jacqueline, "I suppose one must admit that. I should not mind if some one did break in upon our solitude. But I am not romantic. I'd rather wait a little longer than have my slumbers invaded by a specter bridegroom or a masked thief. I'd rather see naught but the grass growing and the dust blowing, and no one but the butcher-boy approaching. By the way, a visit from him would be a positive treat. I'm no epicure, but I should like to see a leg of mutton muchly."

"They only kill at Embridge once a week," said Claire—"so Mrs. Lane tells me."

"That's one of the pains and penalties of country life!" Jacqueline sighed. "Our dinners may be sweetly rural; but when bacon and beans yesterday are only varied by bacon and cabbage to-day, and Mrs. Lane cheerfully remarks that there'll be plenty left for to-morrow, it grows monotonous."

"And Claire would not let the old woman kill the only pair of fowls she has," complained Nella, "for fear there should be nothing for papa when he arrives."

"Do you know," said Jacqueline, very seriously, "I begin to be tormented with doubts as to whether papa will be grateful for that proof of the dear child's consideration. I have been inquiring into the age of those fowls—indirectly, of course. I wouldn't hurt the feelings of a person who has been attached to them so many years; but, from what I hear, I feel tempted to sing, 'Oh, let them live, those ancient birds.'"

"No, don't sing, Jack," entreated Nella. "The sound makes such echoes."

"What of that? If you studied natural phenomena, you would know that an echo is caused by—what is it caused by, Claire?"

"Your senseless chattering," retorted her sister Nella. "If you knew how it jars upon my nerves—but I did not mean to speak so crossly, Lina, dear."

"Of course you didn't," assented good-humored Jacqueline. "Scold me well, if it's any satisfaction to you."

But her sister did not avail herself of this permission, and there was a pause after this, which remained unbroken till Nella burst into a passionate and reproachful cry of, "I wish papa would come! He ought to have known—"

But the fingers of Claire were lightly touching her lips, and Claire's sweet accents stilled those complaining ones.

"Before he does join us, girls, I think we ought to make a few resolves, and try hard to keep them."

"Hear, hear!" said Jacqueline, kneeling down between her sisters, and resting her curly head against Claire.

"We know it is by no fault of papa's that he has fallen into difficulties, and every one says he has acted nobly in giving up everything to his creditors. We also know we ought to be very thankful to Lord Chalfont's steward for offering us the use of this cottage till we can reconcile ourselves to our—"

"Fallen greatness," murmured Jacqueline.

"Our changed circumstances," Claire went on; "and that instead of grieving over what we have lost, our first thought must be to make the new home as bright and cheerful as we can."

"Even though we have to do it without candles!" said the irrepressible Jacqueline, while Nella sighed. "But it's not so easy to forget."

"No, dear; but the task cannot be such a difficult one for us as for papa, who persists in blaming himself. Reverses must surely affect him more keenly than they touch us, who are young and healthy, and ought to be hopeful. If he comes here weary and dispirited with all he has gone through since he sent us from him, and finds his daughters sullen and dissatisfied, grumbling at our few annoyances, instead of making light of them, for his dear sake—"

"That will do," said Jacqueline, springing up. "The effect of your speech will be spoiled if you add another word. Now to reduce philosophical Claire's theories to practice. I am going to light a fire. We'll look cheerful at all events."

"And I'll go into the kitchen," said Nella, "and bake some of those little cakes for tea. Cook showed us how to make when we were children. Anything's better than staring out at the darkness, and wondering whether the rain will ever cease."

As Nella disappeared, her sisters drew closer together and kissed each other affectionately.

"If we can only keep her spirits up!" murmured Jacqueline. "But when she sits so silent, and looks so melancholy, my heart grows heavy, and it isn't easy to force a smile or a joke."

"Poor, dear Nella!" answered Claire. "We mustn't let ourselves forget that it's a keener trial for her than us. Her marriage postponed, through papa's reverses, and Mr. Eversley's parents doing their utmost to put an end to the engagement—"

"He'll never let them compass that!" cried Jacqueline, impetuously. "He's not worthy our pretty Nella if he hasn't strength of mind enough to be true to her."

"Hush!—she may hear you," whispered Claire; and thus admonished, Jacqueline ran away, to return in a few minutes with her arms full of wood, which, after a stout battle with the smoke, she persuaded to burn in the long-disused grate.

When Nella returned, flushed with bending over her cooking, the hitherto dark, dull room looked pleasantly changed.

The wood fire flung a ruddy glow over a table drawn near the hearth, and covered with the delicate drapery, glittering silver, and ex-

quisite china, which were among the few treasures they had permitted themselves to retain. The faded curtains were drawn across the windows, the kettle was singing on the hob, and the graceful figures of the sisters gave life to the picture as they flitted to and fro; Jacqueline, quick and restless as a bird, and Claire gliding more softly about the table, her slender hands arranging everything in the dainty, orderly fashion she loved.

"As Nella provides the delicacies, she must be queen of the feast," quoth Jacqueline, wheeling forward an arm-chair. "That's always been the rule since we held tea-parties on a stool in the nursery, and gave our guests milk-and-water out of a tin teapot the size of a thimble, and slices of apple for bread-and-butter. Hand her Majesty another cushion to make her look imposing!"

"Hark!" cried Nella, as, with mock solemnity, Jacqueline would have led her to the raised seat at the head of the table. "I knew, I knew I heard the sound of wheels! It is papa, papa!"

Away she flew to admit him, followed by Jacqueline; while Claire, though quite as eager to behold that dear and only parent, hurried to find and light a small traveling lamp she remembered to have seen among their possessions while unpacking.

Meanwhile, her sisters had opened the outer door, braving the gust of wind and rain that drove in so fiercely, to fling themselves upon the gentleman in overcoat, and hat drawn over his eyes, who had just raised the knocker.

"The first kiss for poor Jack, because she's youngest and worst!" cried the owner of that appellation.

"Oh, if you knew how we have been longing for you!" murmured Nella, laying her head on his shoulder.

"And, now he's here, let's all cry, 'Welcome! a hundred welcomes! a hundred thousand welcomes!'" exclaimed her sister. "I'd say it in Irish if I could pronounce it! But my kiss—my kiss, papa! Give me that!"

"My dear girls," replied Mr. Travers, peeping over the shoulder of the tall figure they were hugging, just as Claire appeared with the lamp, and dispelled the darkness, "what are you thinking of?"

Nella uttered a startled cry, and retreated covered with blushes; while Jacqueline, her face equally crimson, caught hold of her father's hand, and drew it around her; and then, for a brief interval, the stranger they had mistaken for Mr. Travers stood gazing at the trio of maidens, whose brunette complexions, almond-shaped eyes, and a certain undulating grace of movement, derived from their mother, a native of the south of France, gave an un-English and piquant character to their beauty.

They, on their return, glanced wonderingly at this unexpected visitor, who, instead of saying anything to dispel their confusion, dropped wearily into a chair, as if suffering from great fatigue or the languor of illness. He had taken off his hat; but, as he was shading his eyes with his hand, as if the light distressed him, very little could be seen of his face beyond a silky mustache and well-formed chin.

"Go back to your sitting-room, my dear children," said Mr. Travers, breaking the short but awkward silence, "and I'll join you as soon as I have settled with the driver of the fly."

"But, papa," said Claire, who felt that it would be scarcely courteous to leave the stranger, who appeared to be an invalid, out in the cold, "you have not introduced us to this gentleman."

Mr. Travers was strangely embarrassed. Never a very practical person, he now looked irresolutely from his daughters to his guest and back again.

"Ah, yes! I had forgotten; but—but don't wait. As Mr.—Mr. Edwards is in ill-health, he will prefer to go to his room directly. Give me a light, and I will show him the way."

"But, papa," whispered Claire, as she handed him the lamp, "you did not warn us that

you would not come alone, and so we have made no preparation for a guest."

"Never mind," answered Mr. Travers, in the same lowered tones. "I am sorry; but it was unavoidable. He shall have my room, and you can contrive me a bed on the sofa. Hush, dear!" he added, as he saw that she was inclined to raise objections to such a plan. "We will make other arrangements to-morrow. Now take your sisters away, and I will be with you shortly."

As the young girls, thus dismissed, were quitting the hall, Jacqueline lingered behind the others, and looked back.

She saw her father take the stranger by the arm, and urge him to rise. His head had fallen on his breast, and at first he disregarded the entreaty, but in a little while he permitted Mr. Travers to assist him to his feet, and they went up-stairs together.

"And was it for this sullen unknown we worked so hard to make the bed-chamber pretty and cosy?" exclaimed Jacqueline. "I surrendered the only decent toilet-glass without murmuring when I thought the sacrifice was for papa; but for a man I never saw before, it's too much! I shall never brush my hair without a pang of regret for my good-nature."

"Who can he be?" queried Nella. "He is young, and would be handsome if it were not for the look of intense suffering on his features. Well-bred he cannot be, or he would have apologized."

"For what?" asked Jacqueline. "It was not his fault. We took him for a respectable elderly father of a family, and treated him accordingly."

"But he might have spoken," pouted Nella. "Who can he be?" she repeated.

Claire shook her head; and her younger sister, remembering that Mr. Travers had been educated for the medical profession, only relinquishing it when the bequest of a relative secured him, as he then hoped, a competency for life, hazarded a conjecture.

"I have it, girls! Perhaps papa intends resuming practice, and has brought this silent stranger to experiment upon."

"What an atrocious supposition!" cried Nella.

"So it is, but it may be founded on fact; and, if it is how shall we reconcile ourselves to the idea of being in a house with a man who does not know how to laugh? Now, hold your tongue, Claire; I am not talking absurdly. If he had ever laughed in his life, he must have done so when Nella and I fell into that ludicrous mistake."

"Papa will tell us all about him when he comes down," said Claire, confidently.

But papa did not seem disposed to be so communicative as his daughter had predicted. He praised Nella's cakes and Jacqueline's tea; thanked Heaven he had his children about him once more; talked of the weather, the miserable time he had passed in London during the sale of his furniture, etc.; of the many kindnesses proffered him by friends; the literary work he had accepted from the publisher of an encyclopædia, which would enable them to live frugally till something else turned up; but still not a word of Mr. Edwards till Jacqueline's curiosity prompted her to question him.

"And who is this gentleman you have brought with you?"

"What, Mr. Richards? Oh, no one you know, my dear—no one you know."

"I am quite aware of that, papa; but allow me to observe his name was Edwards an hour ago."

"Yes, Edwards; of course it is Edwards," said Mr. Travers, wiping his forehead, and staring intently at the fire. "He'll not give you much trouble, my dears, and I dare say he'll leave us again as soon—well, as soon as he feels equal to it."

"Has he been very ill?" asked Claire, sympathetically.

"Oh, no—yes, I mean; that is, slightly so—a great shock—much anxiety of mind. He has been—has been—dear me! I forget what I

was going to say. I hope you'll like this place, children. It is very quiet, is not it? Not many people prying about, eh?"

"Not when it rains, at all events," said Nella, shrugging her pretty shoulders. "We are very glad you have joined us, papa. But will this Mr. Edwards be domesticated with us?"

"Certainly no!" cried Mr. Travers, looking considerably disturbed. "He will, I hope, confine himself to his room as long as he is with us; and the old woman—I have already spoken to her about it—will wait upon him."

"Really, papa," said Jacqueline, with her customary frankness, "Mr. Edwards is quite a mysterious personage! I shall begin to think that he must be a foreign spy, or a prince in disguise, or—"

"And I shall begin to think that my little daughter is chattering foolishly," Mr. Travers observed, in tones that silenced her. "I have been induced by circumstances I cannot explain just now to offer to a comparative stranger hospitality for a few days. I think this is all it concerns any one to know."

"You are not angry with me, papa?" asked Jacqueline, penitently.

"No, love. Your curiosity is, I dare say, very natural; but it does not suit me to gratify it. When Mr. Edwards can dispense with my care, he will go his way. He is nothing to us, and we need not concern ourselves about his affairs."

And then Mr. Travers rose up, as if to signify that the subject was to be dropped at once and forever.

"Where are you going to put me for the night, my dear?"

"Papa shall have my room," Claire decided.

And she led him thither at once. But when, with a kiss and a blessing, he had dismissed her, and she was on her way to rejoin her sisters, she remembered that there was a dress hanging in her closet which she would want to wear in the morning.

Running back, she tapped at the door, and rapidly told her errand.

Mr. Travers, who was unpacking his valise, instantly admitted her, expressing his regret as he did so that he had been obliged to turn her out of her apartment, and Claire went away again, but not to rejoin her sisters.

She retreated to the room she was to share with Jacqueline; and, with hands that were cold and trembling, unhooked the lattice of the window, and let the night air play upon the cheeks that had suddenly become ghastly pale.

Why was it? What had she seen during the last few minutes that sent her to bed with an, as yet, intangible horror weighing upon her, and haunting her even in her dreams? She neither possessed the high spirits of Jacqueline nor the more sensitive organization of Nella.

Her temper was so sweet and equable, her mind so well balanced, that it was in her Mr. Travers invariably placed more reliance and reposed more confidence than in her sisters. But to-night even the firm nerves of Claire were unstrung, and though she had abstained from questioning her father, she could not shake off a dread that something of a serious import had occurred to him while he was in town, with which the silent and apparently suffering Mr. Edwards was concerned.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE SEA-SHORE.

FROM her troubled slumbers Claire was awakened soon after the day broke by some one giving her a sharp pinch.

"Oh, Jack, what has happened?" she gasped, as she started up and cast a terrified glance around her.

"Why, nothing, you goose! Don't look scared, but follow my example. Jump out of bed, and dress as quickly as you can."

"Then there is something wrong!" she ejaculated, trembling in every limb; for al-

ready the fears engendered on the previous night were returning upon her.

"Of course there is," said Jacqueline, tranquilly, as she struggled to get the comb through her crisp waves of raven hair. "Have you forgotten that there is nothing for breakfast but the remains of yesterday's dinner, and part of a stale loaf?—no eggs, no cream, no fresh butter—nothing in or about the house to fall back upon but those dreadful fowls? Oh, chickens neither tender nor true, don't let's have to breakfast on you!"

"Nothing for breakfast! Need you have awakened me to tell me that?" demanded Claire, rather crossly.

"Yes; because we must rise to the occasion. Do you see the pun, darling? Good, isn't it? Hurry up, there's a dear Claire; and you and I will trot off to the village on a foraging expedition."

"In this dreadful weather? Is it absolutely necessary?"

Jacqueline laughingly pulled back the curtains, and let in a flood of sunshine.

"A change has come o'er the spirit of our dreams. A strong wind has blown all night, and dried the ground, and driven the clouds away. The road, at all events, is passable; so, as the lark at heaven's gate sings, we must start off directly. Pray be quick, and put on your things. It's a delicious morning, and the walk will do us good. I'm pining for a breath of the 'cauler air.'"

Before she had finished speaking, Claire had recovered her equanimity, and, her smiles returning, was now expeditiously making her toilet. Jacqueline was quite right; their larder must be replenished, and there was no one to do it but themselves. They had their father and his invalid guest to cater for, and in a very short time she pronounced herself ready for the walk to Embridge.

A note was laid on the pillow of the still sleeping Nella, to apprise her of their intentions; and then, stepping on tiptoe, they prepared to descend the stairs. But, softly though they moved, Mr. Travers called out to know who was there as they passed his door; and, signing to Jacqueline to proceed, Claire entered his room.

He had smilingly listened to her explanation, and was turning on his pillow to finish his morning nap, when his daughter startled him by sinking on her knees beside his bed, and laying her cheek against his.

"Papa," she said, tremulously, "what is it you are hiding from us?"

Mr. Travers raised himself on his elbow, and as she rose, too, and stood with her hands clasped, and eyes questioning his imploringly, he knit his brows in evident perplexity. Was he debating how far to trust her, or whether it would be prudent to evade her inquiries altogether?

"What is it you know or suspect? Be honest, child, and tell me all!"

"I know that you must have met with some accident or received some hurt while you were in London, and that is the reason you did not join us sooner; for last night"—and Claire in her turn caught hold of her father's hand as she spoke—"last night, when I came in here, and would have folded the overcoat you had tossed down yonder, the sleeve was stiff, the lining stained with blood. Oh, papa, what does it mean?"

Mr. Travers drew her nearer to him, and kissed her pale face.

"Don't be foolish, child. It was not I who was hurt. Have you mentioned this to your sisters? No? Then don't do so. I would not have them know it on any account; neither must you allude to it in the hearing of our visitor."

"Of course I shall obey you, sir, but—"

"But you can't shake of the unpleasant impression the circumstance has made. I ought to have guarded against it. The fact is, my dear, I was so unfortunate as to be the sole witness of a very shocking quarrel, which ended in— But I cannot tell you more just

now. It would do no good; so go and do your shopping—the walk will chase away all your foolish ideas."

Before she had gained the door Claire was recalled.

"It may be as well to caution your sisters, my dear, that I don't want Mr. Edwards's visit mentioned in the village. He will leave us shortly, but while he is here, say nothing about him."

Claire thought the caution an odd one; but faithfully repeated her father's injunction to Jacqueline, who put her finger to her lips and began to ponder.

"Dear me! Mr. Richard Edwards, or Edward Richards, begins to grow positively interesting. Who can he be? Has any foreign king been deposed lately? I wonder how he'd behave if I were to say, 'Is your ex-Majesty's tea sweet enough, and does your ex-Majesty condescend to take milk?'"

"If you are going to stand still every time you make a ridiculous conjecture," retorted Claire, "papa will be famished before we get back from Embridge."

Thus admonished, Jacqueline, who had slung a large market basket on her arm, quickened her pace, and the sisters reached the village street just as the two shops it contained were being opened. They succeeded in procuring those articles of which they stood in most need, as well as a promise of a joint and some poultry later in the day; and evading the inquisitive queries of the grocer's wife, who would fain have detained them till she had appeased her curiosity, they turned their steps homeward.

"I'm afraid you'll find the basket heavy long afore you reach the cottage," the woman observed. "If my boy was at home he should carry it for you. Be ye going back along the road? You'd save best part of a mile by crossing the fields, and then keeping to the shore. It's roughish walking, but just turn the rocky point at the end of the bay, and there you are."

The sisters looked at each other. Time was an object to them, the road was long and treeless, and, as is often the case after a continuance of rainy weather, the rays of the sun were already beating down on the earth with unwonted fervor.

"I think we cannot do better than act on your suggestion," said Claire, courteously. "But are we likely to have any trouble in finding our way? Remember, we are newcomers."

"Lawks, miss, no! The field-path is straight enough as far as it goes, and once on the shore you've only to make for the point; but you'd best look sharp and get round it before the tide comes in; young ladies like you could not scramble over the rocks, nobow."

Thanking her with a nod and a smile, they mounted the stile to which she directed them, and carrying the basket between them tripped lightly over the fields of corn and crimson-blossomed clover. After the anxiety of the last few weeks, and the close confinement of the house they had just been enduring, the air and the brisk motion were very exhilarating, and Jacqueline laughed aloud in her gladness when they arrived at the edge of the tall cliffs, and the sea lay glittering in the sunshine at their feet.

But when Claire admonished her sister that they were in haste, Jacqueline was the first to lead the way down the steps roughly hewn in the chalk that led to the narrow strip of shingle lying between the heights and the sea. Some arduous walking on this soon brought them to the long, low line of crag and boulder that jutted out from the land for some distance, and constituted one of the extremities of their own little bay.

This rocky barrier must be passed before they could reach the cottage, and the sisters set down their basket and looked perplexed, for the tide, influenced, perhaps, by the strong breeze in the night, was coming up so rapidly that it had covered the end of the point al-

ready, and to such unpracticed climbers it would be difficult to cross it anywhere else.

"We must either go back or wade!" said Claire. "Which shall it be?"

"Going back is not to be thought of," cried Jacqueline, decidedly. "Those at home would be reduced to starvation or the antediluvian chickabiddies before we could relieve the garrison with our supplies. We must storm the fort, sister mine—that is wade the beach!"

"Fortunately, there's no one to see us!" said the laughing Claire, gayly, as she slipped off her hose and strong walking shoes. "Better let me take the basket, Jack. I think my arm is the stronger."

"And your head steadier; so take it, but be faithful still! Don't let a wave wash into the sugar, for I can't drink my coffee without plenty."

So Claire went first, laden with the provisions, and Jacqueline followed, carrying her own and her sister's pedal coverings, and laughing merrily every time the surf flung its frothy crest over her white feet.

"I feel—I feel I am a child again!" she sung, poising herself on a flat stone; while Claire, who had safely passed the point and reached the firm sand of the bay beyond, put down her load, and rubbed the rounded arm on which the handle of the heavy basket had left a broad red mark. "How delicious to be a mermaid!" Jacqueline went on. "No; not a mermaid! I should object to a cold, scaly tail flapping after me wherever I went. There's nothing graceful about it. A nereid? Yes; I wish I were a sea-nymph in the coral caves, which something waves—no, laves; and—Oh-h-h, Claire!"

The last ejaculation was prolonged to a scream, as she came bounding and splashing to the side of her sister, driven from her perch by the sight of some slimy, marine monster, which turned out to be a bunch of seaweed washed up by the waters.

"Serves me right!" she decided, as she echoed Claire's merry laugh. "Yes; it serves me right for loitering there, and forgetting breakfast. Now to resume the attire of civilized life, and appear like a decorous young lady once more! Here are my shoes. But good gracious, Claire, where are yours?"

"There! there!" gasped her sister, pointing to them, as they rode gayly out to sea on the top of a wave, dropped by Jacqueline in her wild flight from the marine monster. "Oh, Jack Travers, what have you done?"

"It's my fate to be unlucky!" exclaimed that damsel, tragically. "If an accident befalls any one in our family, it's always my fault, or me that comes worst off—always!"

"You!" retorted Claire. "Much cause you have for complaint! You have your shoes safe and dry!"

"Take them!" cried Jacqueline. "They're the only atonement I can offer. Take them, and wear them! Never mind my feet nor my feelings!"

"How can I, when you know they'll not fit me?" retorted Claire. "Your feet are so absurdly small! Now, what is to be done?"

"The Scotch girls often walk barefooted!" observed Jacqueline, with a dubious air, as if she felt that the suggestion was almost an insult.

"Walk barefooted over half a mile of such a steep, stony road as lies between the beach and our cottage? I couldn't do it, Jack!"

And Claire shook her head ruefully but decidedly.

"I suppose not; so you will have to stay quietly here while I fetch you another pair. I'm very sorry, Clary! It's a real blessing that you're so good-tempered!"

Claire accepted the penitent kiss that was offered her; and Jacqueline trudged away with the heavy basket, promising to return as quickly as she could.

"That will not be much under an hour," Claire decided; "for the road is a sharp climb, and with so much to carry, and the sun shining down upon her so fiercely, poor Jack will

not be able to make very rapid progress. It's exceedingly provoking; but I suppose I must be resigned to the inevitable!"

She was about to reseat herself, when she caught sight of her shoes, which, after having been alternately carried out and brought back by the waves, were now to be seen lying on a little ledge of rock at no great distance from where she was standing.

If she could but reach them before another rush of water came and carried them away!

They were her newest, prettiest, and were worth the effort that must be made for their recovery.

Pinning up her skirts once more, away went Claire.

The rocks over which she had to climb were slippery with the long fronds of seaweed that hung about them, and every now and then the tide washed over them, compelling her to retreat. But still she persevered, and had nearly reached the spot where lay her stranded property, when a wave that threatened to engulf her as well as her shoes was seen coming rapidly in shore.

She fled in terror, lost her footing, and as she clung in desperation to the jagged rock from which she had slipped, with a faint cry for help escaping her lips, closed her eyes, that she might not see the roaring waters from which she could no longer escape.

But suddenly a strong arm was thrown around her, and she was raised out of reach of the wave.

As soon as it had expended itself, she was borne back to the sands, and her deliverer, in a low, mellow voice, was expressing his hopes that she had escaped without any injury, before the bewildered girl had thoroughly realized her safety.

Alarm and embarrassment combined to force a few tears from Claire's eyes; but as she wiped them away she became aware that the person who had come to her aid so opportunely, and who was kneeling beside the stone on which he had seated her, doing his best to soothe her, was none other than her father's guest Mr. Edwards. He accounted for his presence by telling her that for the last half-hour he had been lying idly in a hollow of the cliff, from whence he had seen her start on her enterprise, and presaging the consequences, had hastened to her assistance.

Whatever his ailments might be, they were at this moment forgotten; for his voice was firm, his gestures animated, and the intensely sorrowful expression that marked his features on the previous evening had vanished.

As soon as Claire, who was too modest and refined to be fussy, had composed herself, he went back to the rocks, where he made another attempt to recover the lost shoes. But one of them had wholly disappeared, and its owner knew she must resign herself to waiting till Jacqueline appeared.

Her few words of thanks, and the bow that accompanied them, were so plainly significant of dismissal, that Mr. Edwards bowed too, and walked slowly away.

But after he had gone a few paces, he made an irresolute pause and came back.

"I wish you would let me stay with you, Miss Travers," he pleaded. "This is such a lonely spot, that I cannot make up my mind to leave you."

"I am not afraid," said Claire; "and my sister will soon rejoin me."

"But she is not yet in sight; and permit me to remind you that if any of the rough people who sometimes visit the coast were to land here, you would not be able to run away from them."

Claire was silent. She could not bring herself to bid him stay; but was not sorry he lingered near, sometimes coming to her side to bring her a pretty shell or a piece of seaweed, and chattering pleasantly about it, but never pausing long enough to be intrusive.

When he talked, his eyes sparkled with animation; but as soon as silent, gloom and despondency quenched their light.

The furtive glances of the young girl, thus oddly brought in contact with him, told her that he was not many years her senior; that he had the unmistakable air of good breeding; and though not positively handsome, possessed one of those thoughtful, intellectual faces that are singularly attractive.

Claire also discovered that her companion was easily startled. When a boy at work in the distant fields sent forth a loud halloo to a mate, Mr. Edwards turned round with a disturbed air, and drew his hat over his brows, as if he feared that some one was coming, whose recognition he would fain avoid.

In spite of the interest with which he inspired her, Claire felt relieved when she saw her sister coming toward them.

Jacqueline made a full stop as soon as she saw that Claire was not alone, and after a gasp, intended to denote unutterable astonishment, exclaimed, "It is Mr. Richards, is it not?"

The young man seemed as if he had received a blow, and put up his hand with an impulsive gesture.

"Not that name!" he cried, agitatedly. "Call me anything but that."

For once in her life, Jacqueline lost all her presence of mind, and had no answer ready. But she persisted in tormenting Claire, as they walked home with Mr. Edwards, by dropping behind at every opportunity and elevating her eyebrows—the only way by which she could signify her surprise at finding him on the beach, as well as her impatience to know what it meant.

Mr. Travers was leaning on the garden gate when the trio came toward it. He, too, looked so gravely inquiring that Claire grew confused and uncomfortable.

He signed to her to go indoors, thus sparing her the annoyance of having to stammer an explanation; but he vexed Nella by keeping the breakfast waiting while he walked to and fro the weedy lawn with his guest, discussing what, to judge by their sober looks, was not only a serious, but an unpleasant topic.

"What can they have to say to each other?" grumbled Jacqueline. "The eggs will be cold and hard, and I am frightfully hungry. Some one—let it be you, Nella; or you, my Claire—must politely hint to Mr. Edwards that we don't like to be kept waiting for our meals. Remind him that punctuality is the thief—no, the—something else—of good living, or good—what is it, Nella?"

"Never mind what," was the reply. "Mr. Edwards will not take his meals with us. Mrs. Lane is to serve them in the little room we sat apart for papa's books and writing-table. And, girls, listen! I do believe she knows him; for she shook her head, and looked so odd, when I called him Mr. Edwards."

"Put her to the question; extract from her all she knows," Jacqueline recommended. "Get her into the kitchen cupboard, and don't let her out until she has revealed everything!"

"And displease papa!" said Claire. "If there is anything he wishes us to know about his guest, he will himself tell us. But here he is!"

Mr. Travers ate his cold eggs without complaining; and when the daring Jacqueline hinted her surprise at Mr. Edwards's unsocial habits, told her promptly that the young man was neither in health nor spirits to bear with the chattering of three thoughtless girls. But presently he drew Claire aside.

"My dear, how came Mr. Edwards to be with you this morning?"

He looked so troubled that her color rose as she narrated the circumstances that had led their visitor to come to her aid.

"He was very polite, papa; very nice, and—you're not angry, are you?"

"With you, child? No, no; but I wish it had not happened. In future I should like you to avoid him; that is to keep out of his way as much as you can without appearing rude."

Claire was still standing in the hall pondering over her father's speech when he came back to her.

"I had almost forgotten," he said, in a hurried whisper. "Can you put that coat out of sight—lock it up somewhere? I don't want your sisters to see it, and question me."

Claire nodded, and ran up-stairs directly to carry out his wish. There was a closet in the room her father occupied, of which she only had the key, and, holding the garment at arm's-length, she carried it thither and flung it into the furthest corner.

As she did this, a newspaper dropped out of the folds of the coat, or off the chair onto which Mr. Travers had tossed it. Claire's orderly habits led her to pick it up; but she could never tell what induced her to scan the news instead of laying it aside for the waste-paper basket.

Half-way down the second column she came on a paragraph that was headed with the ominous words, "Mysterious Disappearance of the Earl of Chalfont."

The name of this gentleman had a familiar sound in her ears, for Lord Chalfont's steward was one of Mr. Travers's oldest friends. It was through him they had obtained permission to reside in the cottage, and she had often heard him, during his visits to her father, talk of the many good qualities of the late Earl, and express his fears that the too impetuous, too generous disposition of the present one was leading him into evil courses.

Could her father have seen this announcement? Claire was sufficiently interested in it to take the newspaper away with her, and read it at her leisure.

It stated that the Earl had quitted his house in Wilton Crescent on a certain evening, with the avowed intention of seeking an interview with a Mr. Richardson, a person whose acquaintance he had made at college, and with whom he had since been on very intimate terms.

Two or three of his father's friends had looked doubtfully on this intimacy, and hinted opinions of Mr. Richardson which were not favorable; but the Earl was stanch to his friend till a coolness had arisen between them, no one knew how or why. It was no secret, however, that angry letters had passed, which resulted in an appointment he left his own house to fulfill, telling his valet, an old and trusted servant, that he had hit upon a plan by which he hoped to please all his friends, and adjust all his differences with them.

From the hour when Lord Chalfont, in the highest of spirits, had walked away from his own door to fulfill this engagement, he had been seen no more, and what had become of him was a mystery.

Miss Richardson, a young lady of considerable personal attractions, admitted that her brother had agreed to meet the Earl on or near the Thames Embankment, and he had been seen with his lordship, or some one answering to his description, at no great distance from the Temple stairs.

Both the young men were then talking loudly and angrily; more than this, a person deposed to have heard a shout for help proceeding from that direction about the time the quarrel took place.

On examining the spot these witnesses indicated, signs of an affray were distinctly visible; and there, too, one of the Earl's gloves was found, as well as a signet ring, broken, which was identified as his. Neither of the gentlemen had been seen since that night, and Miss Richardson, when further attempts were made to question her, first prevaricated, and then became hysterical.

It was beginning to be universally believed that the brother of this unhappy woman, on being reproached by the Earl, and perhaps threatened with exposure, had committed a frightful crime, and had dropped the body of his victim into the river.

When Miss Richardson learned the form suspicion was taking, she had vehemently declared that her brother was not—could not be guilty; that, whatever might have happened, Lord Chalfont was to blame for provoking a

desperate man; but, when asked to explain herself, would say no more.

The newspaper fell from Claire's hands. Her father had admitted that he was the unwilling witness of a terrible quarrel that had ended—Ah! he had paused there, as if he could not bring himself to enter upon further details. And he had brought with him a stranger, of whom he gave a hesitating and evasive account; a person whom he bade his daughters shun, as if he disliked him, even while offering him the shelter of his roof.

Mr. Travers had done many generous acts in his life. His friends were wont to say that he was too liberal to those who craved his assistance, too lenient to those who had sinned. Was it this overflowing milk of human kindness that had led him to stand between the guilty Richardson and the punishment he merited? Was the man to whom Claire had that morning owed her rescue from danger a culprit, fleeing from detection? Had the hands that were put forth to save her been raised against the life of another?

Claire suddenly crushed the paper into a ball, and threw it from her, for Jacqueline was coming up-stairs, calling her as she came.

"It is papa's secret, not mine," she murmured. "If Mr. Edwards's sufferings spring from remorse, may Heaven pardon him! But I wish he had not come here. It is selfish to say so, but how can I be thankful to him for having saved my life when the horrible thought is tormenting me that the same hands that drew me from the waves have been raised to strike down one who had loved and trusted him but too well?"

CHAPTER III.

PAPA'S INJUNCTIONS.

A FEW weeks of genial weather, and the cheerfulness with which their father accommodated himself to his altered circumstances, tended to reconcile his daughters to their new home.

Nella was cheered by a letter from her betrothed, promising eternal constancy.

Jacqueline was too busy to be unhappy; and even Claire, when she could resist brooding over the little she knew, and what else she suspected about Mr. Edwards, was as cheerful as the rest.

There was much to be done ere their residence could be considered habitable. The once handsome paper in the sitting-rooms had either fallen off, or was hanging from the wall in rags; and as workmen were not to be had, the sisters were forced to exercise their own ingenuity, hiding the defects in their paper-hanging with the water-color drawings and oleographs they had brought from town.

With these, and a few yards of new chintz to replace the faded curtains, and hide the moth-eaten coverings of the chairs and sofas, the apartments were made bright as well as cosy.

Then the garden proved, on closer inspection, to be well stocked with rare plants, although they were choked with weeds and almost ruined with neglect.

As the sisters dearly loved flowers, they were anxious to have this state of affairs remedied, and promised themselves much pleasant employment among their flower-beds when the rougher work had been done for them.

There was also a pretty rustic summer-house perched on a ledge of rock by the side of, and about half-way down, the path leading to the bay. This would be a charming retreat, to which they could carry their books and work if the rustic benches were repaired, and the jessamine, climbing-roses, and westeria, now blown down from their supports and trailing on the ground, pruned and trained over the walls once more.

Mr. Travers assented promptly to every thing his daughters proposed, and even threw out fresh suggestions and planned more improvements. But when he had done this, and agreed with them that the sooner the work was commenced the better, he would return to

his study, and forget that he had promised to help them.

Claire and Jacqueline would have been sadly at a loss—Nella had given up directly—if Mr. Edwards, after watching them awhile from the study window, had not offered his assistance, and, without appearing to notice their hesitation, immediately set to work with a will.

From this time forward he always contrived to be near when the help of his stronger arms could be useful. Jacqueline rather contemptuously observed that it was evident he was a Londoner, and had never been taught to do much with those long white fingers of his; and she could not reconcile herself to the sorrowful reserve from which her liveliest sallies had not power to rouse him. But those white hands were always at her service, and the gentlemanly, unobtrusive Mr. Edwards was certainly a most valuable assistant. It was he who mounted the steps and hung the long breadths of paper which Nella was vainly striving to fix properly. It was he who took the spade away from Claire, and, working under her directions, chopped up weeds, pruned and budded roses, and raked the beds into beautiful order. It was Mr. Edwards who, at a whisper from Jacqueline, seized upon hammer and tacks, and pruning-knife, and in the course of a few days made the summer-house a delightful retreat once more.

Claire felt quite uncomfortable when she heard her sisters sing his praises; for, although tempted to join in them, she could not banish the suspicions that newspaper article had engendered.

"He begins to get quite conversible," said Nella. "On one occasion yesterday, when he was assisting me to cover that old screen, we had quite a pleasant chat about books we had both read. As his health improves—and he looks much better than when he first came, doesn't he?—we shall find him quite an acquisition to our domestic circle."

"It's my firm belief," cried Jacqueline, "that he's a blighted being. Love and despair, and all that, you know, has pressed upon him. There's no other way of accounting for the moody, unsocial fits he still has; and I'm afraid I have the misfortune to put him in mind of his false one."

"You, Jack?"

"Yes," she answered, tranquilly. "Why not? Have you not observed that whenever I have succeeded in making him smile—and it's no easy task; hundreds of my neatest jokes are quite wasted on him—he always goes off to the shore directly after? I have not had an opportunity of following him there; but it's my firm conviction that he tears his hair and beats his breast by the sad sea waves, and hates poor me for recalling the heartless one who was the cause of all his anguish. When he and I are more intimate—"

"I don't think papa wishes us to be very intimate with Mr. Edwards," Claire interposed.

"My dear child, there's no danger. At the rate we are now progressing, we sha'n't reach that stage of friendship for the next five years. When we have done so, I shall ask him to tell me all about it—in more sentimental language, of course. I should dearly like to be the confidant of a love affair. Nothing prosy, you know, but a deliciously romantic one, like, I am certain, his must be."

But the bare idea of Jacqueline insinuating herself into the confidence of Mr. Edwards was so startling to Claire, that it sent her to her father in his study, where he was correcting the proofs of the first paper he had forwarded to his publishers.

"Do listen to me for a few minutes, papa, will you?" she entreated, when she saw that he did not care to be interrupted. "I want to speak to you about Mr. Edwards."

"Ah!"—and Mr. Travers laid down his pen, and ran his hands through his hair,— "what is it now, Clary? I'm afraid I did a foolish thing bringing that young man here; but, under the circumstances, and in his then frightful state

of mind, I don't know what else I could have done, do you?"

"Without knowing particulars, how can I answer you?" asked Claire. "But I hope you will not get into any trouble through your well-meant act," she added, anxiously.

"I hope not, too," he answered, in rather dubious tones. "But what was it you wanted to say?"

"Only this, papa: that, if I understood you rightly, Mr. Edwards's stay here was not to extend over a few days. It is now three weeks since he came."

Mr. Travers nodded gravely.

"I know—I know! But how can I thrust him forth until I feel that he no longer needs this haven?"

"But, papa, you bade us avoid him; and how can we do so now he no longer stays with you in your study, but is always running about the house or the garden, offering us aid we do not know how to refuse, and behaving as a guest feels justified in doing?"

"Is this all you have to complain of, Claire?" her father demanded, with a penetrating look. "He does not presume on your courtesy?—he does not offer attentions at which you feel you can justly cavil?"

"Oh, no, no, papa; I did not intend to imply any such thing. He is always quiet and gentlemanly. Nella and Jack like him much."

Mr. Travers pondered long and gravely; then raised his eyes once more to the sweet, serious face of his daughter.

"Child, I am in a dilemma. When I conducted hither that unhappy young man he was almost mad with shame and remorse. I verily believe that his brain would have given way if I had not taken the responsibility on myself of bringing him away from London and all its haunting recollections. You do not blame me for it, my dear?"

"Oh, papa, how can I, when I know that the best of feelings prompted you? But is he not encroaching on your goodness by staying so long? He should not be here now. Can he be ignorant that he is, or will be, sought for?"

"Claire, you speak as if you knew, or guessed, more than I have told you."

"I'm afraid I do, papa," she whispered, tremulously. "There was a paragraph in a newspaper you brought home, that I could not but couple with what you told me about that dreadful quarrel."

"And your sisters, do they share your suspicions?"

"Oh, no, no! I have not breathed a word to them."

"That's well. I have not as much faith in their discretion as in yours, my dear. Keep the secret a little longer. As soon as I feel that our guest can depart with safety to himself, I will urge it upon him. Till then we must have patience with and pity him. He is undergoing a frightful ordeal for a human soul to pass through. There are moments when our misdoings pierce us like barbed arrows, and we feel that their consequences crush out of us all hope, all energy."

"I do pity him," responded Claire, her voice broken with emotion; "but it chills, it horrifies me, to accept any service at hands that have been raised against a fellow-creature's life."

"If you knew the amount of provocation that he received!" her father began, then checked himself, and said hastily: "But we will not discuss this question. There were grave faults, doubtless, on both sides. Lord Chalfont had himself to blame for much that occurred; and when we think that he might have been killed on the spot, or given his adversary, during the struggle, a fatal blow—"

"Then he is not dead?" Claire broke in, so relieved that she could scarcely keep back a sob.

"No; but very ill, and keeping out of the way of his creditors, who are infuriated at the reckless manner in which he has behaved. But all this miserable record of folly and want of

principle in a young man, whom nature certainly intended for something better, need not be poured into your ears, my love. Now you know the real name and position of Mr. Edwards, as we will continue to call him. I need not impress on you to be careful not to let Nella or Jacqueline go beyond the bounds of mere acquaintanceship. In a short time he will cross to the Continent, and then we will forget that we ever knew him."

Claire promised to obey all her father's injunctions; but it was no easy task to do so. How could she help her own manner taking a softer tone toward their guest now that she knew his guilt was not of so deep a dye as she had feared? And how could she prevent this intimacy increasing when a week of dull weather confined every one to the house, and threw her sisters and Mr. Edwards together continually?

Mr. Travers, good, unsuspecting man, shut himself up in his study, absorbed in his work; but Mr. Edwards often brought a book into the family sitting-room, and sat in one of the bay windows alternately reading or musing, or watching, with unconcealed interest, the movements of the sisters; nor could Jacqueline, the irrepressible Jacqueline, be prevented from referring to him so continually, that he would have been churlish had he not entered into her pursuits.

"Why should I not talk to Mr. Edwards?" she demanded, when Claire ventured to counsel greater reticence. "Tell me why not, and I'll do as you advise, *if I can*. Is he dangerous? Will he bite? Under that calm demeanor does he hide any ogreish tendencies, and will he pounce on me some day, and swallow me up?"

"Do be reasonable, Jack. Have I not told you that papa does not wish us to be too friendly with Mr. Edwards? You can be courteous to him without going to further lengths."

"Let me see. What was the extent of my friendly advances to him yesterday? First and foremost, I said, 'Thank you,' when he picked up my scissors. Secondly, I was guilty of remarking that the weather seemed to be improving; and when he asked me if I had a volume of Longfellow's poems in the house, I went and found it for him. Now was there any harm in any of those acts?"

"No, dear; but you need not have teased him with your pretended dislike for Longfellow till you had lured him and Nella into a discussion on poetry that lasted all the afternoon."

"And to which Miss Claire Travers lent the most profound attention," Jacqueline reminded her.

"I own that I was struck with some of his remarks on 'Evangeline,' but don't laugh—don't put me off with a sneer at my own weakness, dear Jack. Thrown as we are into the society of a young man of whom we know absolutely nothing, surely our own good sense ought to teach us not to make him one of ourselves."

"Now, really, Claire, your scruples are ridiculous!" cried Nella. "Is it at all probable that papa would have brought Mr. Edwards here if he had not considered him fit to associate with his daughters?"

"Papa did not anticipate his staying so long," was the evasive reply.

"He is very nice; I like him," said Jacqueline, with her customary frankness; "but only when he brightens up. When he has his melancholy moods on, I feel blue too. Who is he, Claire? What is he? Where does he come from, and where is he going? Does he belong to a secret society, or was my first conjecture the true one, and is he a blighted being? If so isn't it permissible for me to console him for the cruelty of the heartless fair one who has brought him into this morbid condition?"

"You had better make out a list of your questions, and let me submit them to papa," retorted Claire, good-humoredly.

"Very well, my dear; and you had better leave me to my own devices. I have not learned the art of stand-offishness. I cannot

sit in the same room with a person for an hour at a time, and confine myself to a 'Yes' or 'No'; and, while Mr. Edwards is here, I must and will be civil to him—unless, indeed, papa absolutely forbids it."

"I wish he would go," said Claire to herself; then blushed, and hung her head; for she knew that, in her heart, she did not wish any such thing.

The mystery surrounding him, his sorrowful air, and her father's hints that he had been more sinned against than sinning, all tended to invest him with a romantic interest in the eyes of warm-hearted Claire Travers.

If she had never read that newspaper—never discovered that he was one of the actors in the scene of strife it narrated—how much secret uneasiness she would have been spared!

She tried to keep Mr. Edwards at bay by assuming the cold reserve she vainly preached to her sisters, and had the mortification of hearing Nella confide to Jacqueline that when Claire did take up a prejudice against any one, she was strangely bitter; and, more provoking still, she saw that both of them strove to atone to poor Mr. Edwards for their sister's injustice by treating him with additional courtesy and kindness.

Nella gratefully accepted his assistance in her drawings; and Jack, idle Jack, who was wont to say that her affection for her mother tongue was too great to permit of her excelling in any other languages, actually commenced the study of German, with Mr. Edwards for her tutor.

CHAPTER IV.

NORMAN GREY.

"News, news!" cried Jacqueline, one afternoon, when the sisters had carried their books and work to the summer-house overlooking the bay; and Mr. Edwards had found his way there, too, and was training some tendrils of jasmine that the wind had broken down.

"If it's village gossip, spare us," said Nella. "Mrs. Lane always inflicts a dose upon me when I am in the kitchen, making the pastry for dinner; and as I don't know any of the people in Embridge, it's a bore."

"Heartless thing, not to be glad to hear that Molly Jones's baby has cut another tooth, and Jenkins's pig did not die, after all! But mine is London news."

And the merry speaker flourished a paper before her sister's eyes.

"Dear Jack, you forget that papa does not like us to read the daily papers," said Claire, with a furtive glance at Mr. Edwards, who had suspended his work to listen.

"Oh, but I asked him if I might have this one, and he said 'Yes'; and why don't you let me proceed? Do you remember that pretty Lettie Anson who was staying with our friends, the Maynes? Well, she's married, and here is a full, true, and particular account of her wedding!"

The three female heads drew closer together at this announcement, and Mr. Edwards went on with his task till the chorus of "How very pretty!—how nice she must have looked!" came to an end.

"I mean to wear ivory satin at my wedding; nothing else would suit such a brownie as I am!" said Jacqueline, as she folded the paper. "But, oh! here's something else interesting! 'The Chalfont Case.' What's the Chalfont case. Does any one know?"

"Don't read that!" murmured Claire, with another furtive glance in the direction of the door.

"But, my dear, I've caught sight of the word 'Mystery.' After that, my curiosity won't permit me to stop! Let me see—where was it? Oh, here!

"The police are still investigating the extraordinary disappearance of the Earl of Chalfont—"

Here Jacqueline broke off to address Mr. Edwards, who was now leaning against one of the door-posts, looking in.

"This interests us, Mr. Edwards, because our cottage stands on part of one of the Chalfont estates, and Mr. and Mrs. Lane are old

servants of that family. The present Earl is, I believe, quite a young man."

"Oh, Jack, who cares to hear all these details?" asked Nella, impatiently. "Do go on reading."

"This is the way my elder sisters snub me whenever I try to impart a little useful information!" And Jacqueline cast up her eyes. "'Tis ever thus from childhood's hour! But I've lost my place! Oh, here it is!"

Claire locked her hands in her lap, under her work, for she could see that Mr. Edwards was trembling with excitement.

"—disappearance of the Earl of Chalfont," read Jacqueline. "The only person who could throw any light on this mysterious event is still at large, though the authorities at Scotland Yard are using unremitting efforts to discover whether he is still in England or has fled to the Continent. The affair has received a fresh complication. Within these last few days we are informed that a check, purporting to be drawn by Lord Chalfont himself—"

"Who spoke?" Jacqueline interrupted herself to ask.

Claire did not venture to look at Mr. Edwards, from whose lips the exclamation that startled the reader had proceeded; and Nella answered, sharply, "No one spoke! Why don't you go on?"

"—purporting," Jacqueline repeated, "to be drawn by Lord Chalfont himself, but which his bankers believe to be a clever forgery, has been presented at Messrs. Hammonds'. If his lordship is still living, as Miss Richardson persists in asserting, why does he not come forward, and put an end to the suspense of his friends? If not, and the graver conjecture that has been hazarded is correct, Mr. Richardson will only strengthen it by keeping out of the way. It is time more decided steps were taken to ascertain the fate of the young nobleman who has so strangely disappeared."

"That's all!" said Jacqueline; "and I'm not much the wiser for my pains! It's like the story that has neither beginning nor ending!"

"But how awful it must be for those to whom Lord Chalfont is dear!" observed Nella. "To wait day after day for tidings and get none, and to be weighed down with a dread that he must have come to an untimely end!"

"He has no mother!" mused Jacqueline. "I wonder whether he has a sister, or whether there is some one nearer and dearer still in the predicament Nella has been describing? Do you happen to know anything about him, Mr. Edwards?"

Claire gasped an imploring "Oh, don't!" in her desire to shield him from questions that must be torture. She alone had seen how powerfully the reading of the paragraph affected him; she alone had some faint clew to the conflicting emotions that swept across his face as he listened.

Instead of replying to Jacqueline's question, he seized the paper she laid on the table, and with a brusque "Allow me!" vanished with it.

"How odd he is!" the young girl exclaimed.

"Not at all," said Nella, who was too busy sorting some crewels to be very observant of what was passing around her. "Mr. Edwards prefers the political news to your sensational paragraphs."

"And yet I minded my stops, and read it beautifully. Men are very obtuse, as he seems to have reminded himself already; for here he comes again to apologize!"

A masculine step was certainly approaching, but not from the direction Mr. Edwards had taken, nor was he the owner of the saucy little terrier that dashed into the summer-house and put to flight the pet kitten that had been reposing on Nella's lap. Mr. Edwards had gone back to the house, whereas this person was coming up from the bay, whistling a Scotch tune merrily.

He walked with the springy step of one who is accustomed to a great deal of out-door exercise; and his frank, pleasant face was reddened and bronzed with exposure to the sun.

His blue yachting suit had lost its first gloss, and his hands betrayed that he scorned the too frequent use of gloves; yet the diamond edition of one of our best authors that peeped out of his breast-pocket proved that he was not in-

sensible to the charms of literature; and he had the indescribable air that marks the gentleman.

He snatched off the Highland bonnet he wore as soon as he came in front of the rustic building and caught sight of the nut-brown maidens seated there. His surprise and embarrassment at finding himself brought thus unexpectedly face to face with three graceful, beautiful girls, dressed with tasteful simplicity, and betraying no rustic confusion at his presence, was so great that a quizzical smile began to hover on the very lips of Jacqueline.

"I beg your pardon, ladies!" he said, as soon as he found his voice. "I am afraid that I and my dog have been, though unintentionally, trespassing. I was informed that the land about the bay, into which I have just rowed my skiff, pertained to the Chalfont estate, or I should not have strayed up the pretty path I found."

Nella quietly explained that her father, Mr. Travers, had received permission to reside in a cottage belonging to the Earl.

"Then I am sorry I came here, and yet I hope you will permit me to view the cottage, if only for a moment?" the young man replied. "My name is Norman Grey, and my mother, who was related to the last Earl, and spent part of her youth at the Priory, has often spoken to me of this pretty little place. I promised her that I would not leave the neighborhood without visiting a spot still so dear to her."

But when Claire rose to lead the way to the house, saying she was sure her father would be pleased to receive Mr. Grey, he was too courteous to permit her to do so.

"If you will kindly mention to Mr. Travers that I am staying at the Priory for a few days, he will, I dare say, appoint a time when I may call upon him."

"We understood that the family occupying the Priory had gone abroad," observed Jacqueline, who could not be silent any longer.

Mr. Grey assented.

"Yes; my friends are away, but they have placed the house at my disposal; and though I find the evenings long and ghostly, I contrive to secure plenty of out-door amusement for the day. The fishing is excellent."

"And you have a boat?" said Jacqueline, standing on tip-toe to peer through the trees edging the path, and obtain a glimpse of the spot where it was moored. "I wish we had."

The young man looked admiringly at the pretty, animated speaker, and said, "Yes, it is a very nice skiff, safe and commodious. Will you come and look at it? I should be most happy to take you ladies round the bay in it, if Mr. Travers would intrust you to my care."

He spoke so frankly and pleasantly that Jacqueline was delighted with him, and even the more reserved Nella confessed to being very fond of boating.

Before Mr. Grey returned to the shore, he had contrived to win the favorable opinion of his new acquaintances; and when he expressed his intention of making his formal call on the morrow, and gayly bade the sisters remember that they had tacitly consented to accept his offer, they heard him with smiles of encouragement.

"Who is he, papa?" Mr. Travers was asked, when the little piece of pasteboard had been laid before him, on which was engraved "Norman Grey, Greyworth Castle, Cumberland." "Yes, we know that he is related to the Chalfonts; but in what degree?"

"Heir presumptive to the property," said Mr. Travers, lowering his voice, and glancing toward the window, at which their guest generally sat; but he was not there. Jacqueline reported that she had seen him pacing one of the garden paths, looking his grumpiest.

"Then if the Earl be really dead—" Nella began.

"Who says he is dead?" cried her father, testily. "Newspaper reports? You have no business to read them. I hope you had not the bad taste to broach the subject to Mr. Grey?"

"Papa!" exclaimed Nella, reproachfully.

"Do you imagine we could be guilty of such impertinence?"

"Well, well, I beg your pardon, my dears; but these things harass me. Weren't you planning a long walk for to-morrow? I should like the house to myself when Mr. Grey calls. We must not forget that, situated as we now are, we cannot afford to entertain visitors. If you are not at home there will be no excuse for his remaining or making another call."

"And thus end all my visions of learning to be an accomplished oarswoman, and having delicious evenings on the briny ocean!" sighed Jacqueline, twinkling a tear from her eyelash. "We begin to feel how keen the stings of poverty can be when forced to give up the most innocent pleasures."

"Perhaps we can hire a small skiff in Embridge," said Claire, consolingly.

"Yes; but you can't hire a Norman Grey to row it," retorted Jacqueline, in most lugubrious accents; "and I don't like solitary amusements. What will he—Mr. Grey, I mean—think when he comes here to-morrow, and finds that we are all sent out of his way?"

"Will he trouble himself to think of us at all?" murmured Nella. "If he asks in Embridge who we are, there will be people ill-naturedly ready to make him understand that we are no longer on an equality with the presumptive heir of an Earl."

But now Claire's sweet voice made itself heard.

"Dear Nella, that sounds like a reflection on papa. Surely we, who know how gifted he is and how good, ought to be too proud to be spoken of as his daughters, to care what spiteful remarks may be made about us."

"But it is hard, as poor Jacqueline says, to be buried alive here, and denied the society of a sensible man when one does come in our way."

"Our walk to the ruined castle was planned before we saw Mr. Grey," Claire reminded her sisters; and as they could not deny this, the subject dropped. But it was not with their customary cheerfulness that they set out on the morrow. Jacqueline's thoughts still dwelt on her disappointment, Nella never cared for long walks, and Claire was dull because she saw her sisters out of spirits, and sympathized with them.

Presently Nella called a halt, and sat down on a bank.

"Why are we going to this castle? We must traverse another mile of sandy, dusty, shadeless road to reach it, and what shall we see when we get there?"

"A tall tower very much out of repair; a bit of old wall stretching out here and there; and that is all," Jacqueline replied.

"But the view is magnificent," Claire interposed.

"So says the guide-book; I don't suppose it's a whit better than we have from the hill behind our cottage."

"Then what are we going for?" asked Nella again, with a discontented air.

"To poke and potter into all the holes and corners," said Jacqueline, with a yawn. "To sketch some picturesque bit of the ruins; to look around us and say, 'How sublime!' then yawn, bruise ourselves against the stones that stick out of the ground everywhere, and tear our clothes with the brambles. That's what every one does when they go to explore old castles. I'm like the child—I wonder why they don't repair some of them? there's so many, that they're a nuisance. Go where you will, you are called upon to admire ruins. I'm sick of ruins!"

"Have you finished?" asked Claire, when Jacqueline paused for breath. "May I remind you that it was Jack Travers herself who proposed this expedition, and declared that it was a disgrace to us all to have been here so long and not to have seen Snaresbrook?"

"But I didn't say that we were to go on such a broiling day as this," muttered her sister, pulling her hat over her eyes.

"Let us stay where we are," suggested Nella, who had installed herself under a shady tree

that grew by the wayside. "It is very comfortable here."

"Stay to be stared at by all the wagoners jogging by?—impossible! Do you forget that it is market day at Eastport, and that this is the highway to that ancient town?"

"Then what shall we do?" asked Nella, peevishly. "You object to proceeding. We cannot go home without displeasing papa; and yet—"

"Touch the harp gently, my pretty Louise; here's some one coming, coming, coming," sung Jacqueline, under her breath. "And if it isn't Mr. Edwards!"

"Papa is ill. He is sent to recall us!" cried Claire, hurrying to meet the new-comer.

But Mr. Edwards hastened to relieve her fears. He had just learned from Mr. Travers whether his daughters had turned their steps, and had obtained permission to follow and apprise them that by making a slight detour they could avoid the dusty road, and reach the castle by means of a lane between coppices, which they would find delightfully shady.

"But who is to direct us to this lane?" queried Nella.

"I shall be happy to do so," he replied; and led the way.

"Then you have been here before?" cried Jacqueline, when he had proved himself thoroughly conversant with the charming but somewhat intricate route.

"Yes; I have been here two or three times, but not lately," he admitted, reddening a little as he spoke.

"Alone?" Jacqueline persisted in querying.

"With—the Earl of Chalfont," he answered; and his embarrassment was so evident, that Claire began to call the attention of her sisters to the luxuriant ferns growing on either side, and thus gave him time to recover himself.

The ruined castle proved far more interesting than either of the party had anticipated, and Mr. Edwards became quite animated as he pointed out the noteworthy objects visible from the mound on which the keep was perched.

It was here, beside a spring of cool, clear water, that once supplied the garrison, that Jacqueline spread their lunch on the green-sward, and recovering her spirits, chattered with a gayety that proved infectious. Even Mr. Edwards laughed more than once at her quaint speeches, and with his witty repartees evoked fresh mirth till, moved by a new caprice, she ran off to seek a renowned wishing-well at the foot of the mound.

Nella was sketching the keep, that she might carry home a reminiscence of their visit to Snaresbrook; and Mr. Edwards, stretched on the grass beside her, was pointing her pencils, and advising and suggesting; when Claire, who had been botanizing, reminded her sisters that it was growing late, and they had not yet ascended the keep.

"I should not care to mount those steep, rickety stone steps," objected Nella. "So don't wait for me. When Jack returns she will be pleased to follow you."

Claire scarcely cared to enter the stately ruin alone, but it would have been a pity to lose the view from the summit; and seeing Mr. Edwards raise himself as if about to offer his escort, she turned away quickly, and with a careless "Very well," stepped over the threshold of the building.

It was in tolerably good preservation, and she climbed on and on, sometimes pausing to peep through a loophole, till she found herself within a few feet of the top.

But here her progress was checked, a couple of the steps having disappeared, and left a gap she could not cross unaided.

However, some one was following her up the dark, narrow, and winding staircase, and concluding that it was her sister, she called out in her vexation, "Is it you, Jack? Such a disappointment! We cannot reach the top of the keep after all."

"With a little of my assistance, I think you will be able to do so," the voice of Mr. Ed-

wards replied; and springing past her, he held out his hands.

Too much startled to offer any objection, she accepted his aid, and was dextrously lifted over the obstacle.

So glorious was the panorama spread out before her eyes, that for a few minutes Claire was entranced, and moved from one point to another, exclaiming and admiring. But as her raptures subsided, she began to feel confused by the steady gaze of her companion, before whose eyes her own sunk modestly, and wished aloud that Jacqueline would come.

He startled her by demanding gravely, "Is it a serious annoyance to you, Miss Travers, to be compelled to endure my presence for a few minutes? I do not ask this in anger—I could not be angry with *you*—but in unspeakable sorrow that it should be so. Your father is my generous friend, as well as my host. Your sisters treat me as they would a brother; but you, Miss Travers, if ever you do permit yourself to give me a smile or talk to me freely, always afterward contrive to let me see that you have regretted it."

"I have never intended to be rude," she faltered.

"You could not be that," Mr. Edwards protested.

"Nor ill-natured," Claire went on. "I have always pitied you very much."

"Thanks; but that pity is so coldly expressed. There is such a visible shrinking from me in your demeanor that I can scarcely bear it. Words are not needed to tell me that Mr. Travers has confided everything to his daughter; and that you, judging me by your own pure and exalted standard, have condemned me as unworthy your forgiveness."

"Oh, no, no!" said Claire. "I have never presumed to judge any one."

"But you look upon me as a man to be avoided, not esteemed. If ever I feel that my repentance has atoned for the follies of the past, and that I may venture to look forward to a fairer future, the hope fades away when I see you turn pale if your hand accidentally touches mine. Worse still, there have been moments when your looks have expressed repugnance, nay, absolute *terror*, if I approached you. Then it is that I sink back into despondency, and feel that my punishment is greater than I can bear."

Claire began to tremble. He was so thoroughly in earnest that she scarcely knew how to answer him.

She extended her hand, then drew it back, for she remembered just in time her father's injunction.

"Mr. Edwards," she said, very gently, but very firmly, "I don't think papa would be pleased to hear you talking to me in this way; and I am quite sure he would be vexed with me for staying to listen. You have just said that you have a friend in him. Ah! he is a wiser one than I could be. Let him advise you. I know he thinks that you could not do better than cross to the Continent for a few years, and there lead the changed life of which you speak."

"And do you bid me go?—do you, in this pitiless manner, send me from you?"

Claire drew herself up with a stately gesture. Mr. Edwards was taking an ungenerous advantage of her inability to escape him.

How dare he, guilty by his own confession of many evil deeds, if not of the grave crime imputed to him, address such lover-like speeches to her?

"I should prefer to rejoin my sisters," she said, moving toward the turret in which the stairs were situated.

But he followed her, exclaiming, in pleading tones, "And you will not give me one word of hope?—you will not let me have the blissful consciousness that there is some one in the world who cares for me a little, and who, with her prayers, will help me to become a better, wiser man?"

"Your future is in your own hands, Mr. Edwards," she answered, coldly.

As she persisted in commencing the descent, he was compelled to accompany her; and if her breath came rapidly, and her color changed more than once when she was obliged to let him lift her over the chasm, he was careful not to distress her by noticing it.

But when they had descended about half-way, a ponderous door barred their further progress.

"Have we made a mistake? I don't remember seeing this?" she asked, in some alarm.

The voice of Jacqueline answered through the keyhole, "Are you there, Clary—is Mr. Edwards with you? Ask him to open this terrible door. It's all my fault. It was propped back with some heavy stones, and that ought to have warned me to let it alone; but I wanted to examine the curious lock, and it slammed to with a crash, and wants the strength of a giant to move it."

"A crowbar would do it," said Mr. Edwards, after making several efforts to stir the unwieldy portal.

"A crowbar? Ah, that's a thing I never carry in my pocket," said Jacqueline. "What's it like, and where is it to be found?"

"Not at Snaresbrook, I fear. You have made us prisoners, Miss Jacqueline; and I don't know how we are to escape without more assistance than you can render."

A long-drawn "Oh, dear!" responded to this. "Is Claire *very much* frightened?"

"She does not say so," replied Mr. Edwards, after an anxious glance at his companion, who was struggling with her dismay at the prospect of a lengthy captivity.

But this did not console Jacqueline.

"She never does make a fuss; but she's crying—I'm sure, from her silence, she's crying, poor dear!" And Jacqueline's voice was broken with self-reproach and alarm. "Oh, Mr. Edwards, do tell me what I am to do?"

"There is a farm-house about half a mile from the hill-foot. Go there, and ask them to send some men with a lever to force the door out of the groove into which it has sunk."

Away sped Jacqueline; and Claire, who had climbed up to a window to reconnoiter, saw her rush past Nella, who was still absorbed in her drawing; whisking by at such a rate that the contents of the sketching folio were scattered in all directions. While the vexed artist was collecting them, and endeavoring to regain possession of a paper that the wind had seized and carried over the steepest side of the ruins, Claire called to her. But the sound did not reach the ears for which it was intended. Nella was bent on recovering her sketch, and was too much accustomed to Jacqueline's impetuous movements to suspect that any thing unpleasant had occurred.

Claire came down from the window, looking so flushed and troubled, that Mr. Edwards, whose eyes rarely quitted her face, strove to console her.

"Your sister runs fleetly, Miss Travers. She will soon reach the farm-house. If no one is at home there, I believe that there is a cluster of cottages just beyond, where she is certain to obtain assistance."

Claire made an incoherent reply, and went back to the window, where she watched while Mr. Edwards paced the floor, or stood silently beside her till Jacqueline was seen returning.

"Are you happier now?" he asked, with a smile.

But the blush deepened on Claire's cheek, and so did the troubled look in her brown eyes.

"I believe I understand why you are so uneasy," her companion said—"it would vex you to be found here with me. You think that those who come to release us will couple our names together; and your pride is hurt at the idea, *because you despise me!*"

Claire did not answer. She could not deny that she dreaded the remarks, the jests the thoughtless people might make; but it was not her pride, it was her modesty which was making her bitterly regret that Jacqueline's heedlessness should have placed her in such an awkward position.

Without another word, however, Mr. Edwards swung himself up to a loophole opposite the one at which she was standing, and began knocking out some of the stones, to make the orifice larger.

What was he about to do?

In a moment it flashed into Claire's mind that he proposed squeezing himself through the opening, and dropping from this dangerous height to the ground below.

In the wildest terror she cried to him to desist.

"Come down, Mr. Edwards!—for mercy's sake, come down! I would rather risk anything than that you should be so rash!"

"But there really is no danger," he assured her. "The ivy here is so thick that I can easily let myself down by it."

"But if you should slip!" she gasped. "Mr. Edwards, I entreat you not to make the attempt! Ah! you are frightening me dreadfully! I entreat you not to leave me!"

And Claire burst into such a passion of tears and sobs, that he was forced to obey. Returning to her side, he sustained the now thoroughly overwrought girl in his arms, till the voices of Nella and Jacqueline were heard at the door begging her to keep up her spirits, as the farmer and his two stout sons were close behind, and would soon set her free.

"Of course, it was an awful sensation to be shut up in that ghostly keep!" Jacqueline confided to Nella when they had reached home, and the pale, silent Claire, pleading a headache, had gone to her room. "But I couldn't have imagined that it would upset our brave little sis in this way. As for Mr. Edwards, the manner in which he went off as soon as the door was opened, was on a par with his customary gruffness. Instead of helping to support Claire home, he left her to us, although he must have seen that she could hardly stand. But, there! he's like frosty, wintry weather—he's always chilliest just after a thaw!"

CHAPTER V.

IN NORMAN GREY'S SKIFF.

LONG before the sisters reached home that evening, Mr. Grey had paid his visit to the cottage and departed; but he expressed such regret at not being included in the party to Snaresbrook Castle, that Mr. Travers was quite concerned at his disappointment, and offered to accompany him thither himself on the following day, and give him the advantage of his researches as an archaeologist.

This offer was eagerly accepted; and, when the gentlemen returned from their expedition, tired and dusty with clambering about the ruined towers and exploring some curious subterranean chambers, politeness demanded that Mr. Travers should ask the young man to share the meal Nella had set out on a table on the lawn. Then nothing could be more natural than for the sisters to linger near, and join in the pleasant chat that ensued, when their father had lighted his meerschaum, declaring that he could always talk best when smoking, and Norman Grey, with a cigarette rolled for him by Jacqueline, made a pretense of following his example.

Nor was Mr. Travers's consent to a boating excursion on the morrow very difficult to procure; and friendly relations were so rapidly established between Norman and themselves, that Claire could not resist quizzing her father a little when they were left alone, while Nella and Jacqueline went as far as the summer-house with their departing guest.

But Mr. Travers bore her teasing stoically.

"I don't think there's any harm done, my dear. I certainly did not intend to encourage this intimacy, but Norman Grey and I had a great deal of serious conversation yesterday and to-day, and I like him. He is a frank, intelligent, honorable young fellow. Neither he nor I had any reservation from each other, except—"

"On the subject of Mr. Edwards. You did not tell him that Mr. Edwards is here?"

"No; I did not consider myself bound to mention that."

"But Mr. Edwards ought to know that there is a person staying at the Priory who might recognize him."

"He does know it. I thought it my duty to warn him that Mr. Grey is in the neighborhood."

"And he will go away?"

"Who—Edwards? I don't know, my dear! He did not say so, and *just now* it might be more prudent to stay quietly where he is."

Claire would have liked to know what her father meant by that significant "*just now*;" but, before she could ask for an explanation, Nella and Jacqueline returned, and no other opportunity presented itself. From that time forward, Mr. Norman Grey contrived to find excuses for visiting the cottage daily.

Jacqueline saucily warned him not to make morning calls, lest his doing so should result in his being sent away again because the ladies of the house were cooking the dinner, making the beds, and dusting the furniture. But he received at the same time a hint that they were always willing to sacrifice their evenings to their friends, and he did not hesitate to act upon it.

And what pleasant evenings those were! Their guest—active, energetic, and social—had always some excursion or some amusement to propose. Under his auspices a couple of canoes were brought from the Priory, and the sisters learned to paddle in the smooth waters of the bay; or in his skiff they rowed along the coast, and visited the many strange and beautiful caverns that indented the cliffs, or landed on some rocky shore, where a little search enabled them to find pools that were the haunt of the loveliest of the sea anemones; or, if the weather was too rough for these trips, there was always the sheltered and prettily-situated summer-house with its rustic seats, and the view from its trellised porch, which Nella never tired of sketching, though she never succeeded in satisfying herself.

Here, while the sisters worked, Norman Grey read aloud, or would put down the book to talk sometimes of his Northern home, sometimes of the metropolis, in which he had spent a few days before coming to Embridge.

On one of these occasions, he mentioned that he had been summoned to town by Lord Chalfont's solicitors on the disappearance of their client; and Jacqueline would have plied him with questions if he had not frankly avowed that he had very little to tell.

"As soon as I received a hint that my cousin was still living, and would not thank me to meddle in his affairs," he said, "I determined to come down here, and stay till I was sent for. The little I did learn made me both sorry and angry; sorry that Chalfont should have fallen into the toils of a specious villain, and angry that none of his so-called friends warned him of the true character of the fellow long ago."

"Papa seemed to think that Lord Chalfont was as much to blame as—as the other," said Claire, the color rushing swiftly into her downcast face.

"I must be forgiven, if I differ with Mr. Travers," answered Norman. "If he knew all that I heard while in town, he would feel as I do—that a generous, warm-hearted, unsuspecting lad like Chalfont had no chance against such a thorough scoundrel as that Richardson."

"Will you hand me that book you are demolishing?" asked Jacqueline. "It is a favorite of mine; and, if you must knock something about as soon as you grow warm, don't let it be my poor Shakspeare."

The culprit laughed and apologized, and the subject was not discussed again. There were plenty of pleasanter ones always, and so rapidly and delightfully did the time fly, that Norman reproached himself sometimes as he walked back to the Priory, for having forgotten the outer world so thoroughly that even his letters from home lay on his table unanswered.

Ever since Norman Grey had become a daily guest at the cottage, Mr. Edwards had confined himself to his own room, or had taken long, solitary walks over the downs, from which he did not return till the night had closed in.

And what seemed saddest to Claire was that no one missed him. Her father was engrossed in his literary labors; Nella thought only of herself and her absent lover; and Jacqueline, after saying once or twice, "How unsocial Mr. Edwards is!—why does he not join us?" turned to Norman, and forgot him.

Only Claire remembered the solitary man, and sometimes rose an hour earlier to help Mrs. Lane, that she might have more time to attend to their guest; to set the tray for his breakfast herself; to put a few flowers upon it, and a new book or periodical. But though for days she rarely exchanged a word with him, she knew that he did not forget her.

A bunch of woodland blossoms on her work-table, a new fossil for her little cabinet, or some rare fern added to those she tended in the shadiest corner of the garden, proved that he remembered her tastes, and delighted in ministering to them.

Could he be the heartless villain Mr. Grey had so indignantly termed him? How could she believe that he was irreclaimably vile while he led the life of an anchorite; and, as she learned through Mrs. Lane, gave liberal and regular aid to a poor widow at Embridge, who was burdened with eight or nine children?

It was a problem that often made Claire's heart ache; luckily the solution was nearer at hand than she anticipated.

Sometimes business that he had agreed to attend to for his friends carried Norman Grey to Eastport for a day or two, and then a cloud fell upon pretty Jacqueline. She missed him, as she herself confessed, dreadfully, and would be restless and unable to occupy herself, although Nella scolded, and Claire looked grieved.

"I'm the most ridiculous Jack that ever lived," she said, with a sigh, on one of these occasions; "but the fact is, I was born to shine in society, and cannot afford to lose one of the few admirers who listen to my witty speeches, especially when that one is the most appreciative of my audience."

"You think Mr. Grey admires you," retorted Nella, rather ill-naturedly, "because he politely smiles at your attempts to be amusing?"

"Exactly so," said Jacqueline. "I like my attempts to be smiled at. It encourages me to make fresh ones. How dull you would be if it were not for my doubtful brightness! Better to have the light of a little candle, you know, Nella, than none at all."

She danced off before her sister could make any reply, but came back to coax Claire down the bay.

"Do come," she pleaded. "When I am in one of my fidgety moods, I worry poor. Nella as much as she does me, and to keep the peace you had better separate us."

Claire made the condition that she should be allowed to bring her sketch-book, and permitted to work in peace, and away went the two sisters down the rocky path, to where Norman Grey's skiff was moored.

This boat had a strong attraction for Jacqueline; and, pulling it in shore, she stepped in, and lay back on the cushioned seat, dabbling her hand in the sea, or singing a barcarole softly as the waters rocked her with every rise and fall of their gentle wavelets; and thinking—ah! of whom was she thinking?—the while.

Presently Claire, who had been engrossed with her sketch, sauntered toward her, and the dreamer roused herself to say, "Why don't you join me? From where I sit you could draw the bolder outlines of those crags; and see how lovely they look with the deep rich glow of the setting sun upon them."

But Claire shook her head, saying, "Another time, Jack—another time. It is getting late. I must not recommence at this hour."

However, Jacqueline persisted, and Claire stepped into the boat, observing as she did so that the rope with which it was secured seemed very rotten, and Mr. Grey must be warned of it, or some day he would find his skiff missing.

"Ah! you are right," she exclaimed, as she seated herself beside Jacqueline, and gazed at the tall and rugged cliff high above their heads. "But I am not clever enough to define such a scene or paint such vivid coloring as this."

Still, she could not resist sketching the outlines of the most prominent headland; and with the book open on her knees, was hard at work when she missed her india rubber.

"You must have dropped it on the sands. I'll find it." And up jumped Jacqueline, glad of an excuse for busying herself.

She gave a flying leap from the little barque, and the impetus parted the few remaining strands of the old rope that held it.

Away floated the skiff with Claire, so slowly and gently that both sisters laughed at the *contretemps*.

"Shall I wade out to you?" asked the doer of the mischief; "or will you row yourself ashore?"

"Can I do that?" asked Claire, dubiously. "There is only one oar in the boat. Don't you remember Mr. Grey carried the other away to mend it?"

Jacqueline's color began to fade away, and seeing this, her sister hastened to reassure her.

"Don't be uneasy; the next large wave that comes in will bring me back to the beach."

But Jacqueline only wrung her hands when she heard this.

"Oh, Claire, Claire! *the tide is going out, not coming in!*"

Her hearer felt a chill creep through her veins; but still she would not let her terror become perceptible.

"Going out, is it? Then I must try what I can effect with one oar. I don't suppose I shall have much trouble in getting back to you."

And assuming a composure she was very far from experiencing, Claire succeeded in getting the oar into the water; but she soon saw that in her unpracticed hands it was worse than useless.

She was slowly, surely drifting toward the mouth of the little bay. Once there—once drawn into the stronger currents of the open sea—

She dared not pursue the thought.

Drawing in the oar, she sunk upon her knees in the boat, and covered her paling face with her hands while she commended herself to the protection of Heaven.

Jacqueline saw her do this, and, frantic with alarm, began flying toward home, shrieking wildly for help as she went.

Scarcely had she placed her foot on the first of the rocky steps, when Mr. Edwards came crashing through the bushes that clothed the side of the slope.

Down, down he came with reckless speed to where Jacqueline awaited him.

"Some good angel must have sent you here," she panted, before he could find breath to question her. "Save my sister! Save Claire!"

She pointed to the boat, and Mr. Edwards sprung into the sea; but only to return again and stand looking on either side of him.

Had his courage failed him? Must Claire perish? Would he make no attempt to rescue her?

But as these thoughts passed through the mind of Jacqueline, she saw him running along the sands to where the crescent-shaped bay ended in a spit of land. She saw him flinging off his hat and coat as he went. He was lessening the distance between himself and the skiff, that was sometimes borne back toward the shore with its helpless burden, only to be carried further away again by the receding waves.

Did Claire see him? Did she know that he was coming to her? Yes, yes; for she waved him back, as if to say, "The risk is too great.

If my life must be sacrificed, let me not cause the death of another."

But if he saw her gestures, he did not heed them. Slipping his feet out of his boots, he ran along the narrow spit of sand beneath the headland, and plunged boldly into the sea.

He was a good swimmer, but the distance was considerable, and not all Claire's efforts to steady the skiff could prevent its being borne further and further from him, and nearer and nearer to the wide, remorseless ocean.

She had ceased to pray for herself. Her prayers were now for him who was struggling to reach her.

For a while he breasted the waves manfully. Then, through the deepening twilight, Claire fancied she could see his features growing ghastly with exhaustion.

"Go back!" she cried, her voice shrill with anguish. "Save yourself while there is yet time! Go back and comfort my father!"

The swimmer heard her, compressed his lips, and made fresh efforts.

The wind moaned and sobbed across the bay as if wailing his requiem; the white-winged gulls screamed as they flew shoreward; and Claire knelt in the boat, fancying that above all other sounds she could hear his labored breathing.

He was nearer. The skiff, caught in one of the currents that raced swiftly past the mouth of the bay, was driven toward him. Claire could see his dilated eyes, his white lips, and the fierce efforts he was making to reach her ere his strength utterly failed him. And then, as a wave that broke midway struck his heaving breast and hid him from her sight, her piteous cry was echoed by the hoary crags.

But that cry incited him to one last desperate struggle, and in another minute his relaxing hands have gripped the side of the skiff, with Claire's help he climbs into it, and then lies at her feet, almost insensible.

CHAPTER VI.

NORMAN'S SUSPICIONS.

CLAIRE thought no more of her own peril; forgot that she was still being hurried out to sea, where her only chance of safety was the remote one of being seen and picked up by a passing vessel. She was absorbed in the prostrate figure over which she was bending, and her tears fell fast on the pale face of him who had risked his life for her sake.

She raised Mr. Edwards's head onto her knee; she wrung the water from his hair; chafed one of his cold hands till it grew warm beneath her touch, and clasping her poor little trembling fingers, raised them to his lips.

He lived!—he would live!—and in the first transport of her joy Claire laid her cheek against his clammy brow, while she murmured a fervent thanksgiving.

But he did not move again (perhaps the dreamy bliss of being thus caressed and wept over while he slowly regained perfect consciousness was too sweet to be relinquished), till, frightened at his immobility, she implored him to speak to her.

Then he sat up, and reassured the terrified girl. He felt weak and dizzy, that was all, and already these feelings were beginning to pass away; and again he clasped and kissed her little hands, and spoke so tenderly, so reassuringly, that Claire grew calm, till she remembered those on shore, who must be suffering the direst terror and uncertainty concerning her.

As soon as Mr. Edwards understood this, he roused himself to look around.

Night was lowering over the scene so rapidly that the shore was but a dim line.

They both knew that if Jacqueline had gone to the cottage for assistance she would find none; Mr. Travers would hurry back to the shore with her; but it would be a long time before the help of the Embridge fishermen could be procured, and a boat put off to their aid.

However, Mr. Edwards sent a long, clear shout across the water, once, twice, thrice; and

the third time it was answered in the deeper tones of Mr. Travers.

Then a cheery "All right!" was shouted back to the anxious father and sisters, and Claire found herself wondering if she should ever see them more, if she and her companion were now drifting toward that unknown shore from whence there is no returning.

But Mr. Edwards's next words were hopeful ones.

"The wind is rising; it blows toward the shore; there will soon be enough to carry us round the headland and into Embridge haven, if we had but a sail, or any substitute for one."

"My shawl!" exclaimed Claire, handing him the thick woolen one she had brought down to the beach and thrown into the boat to Jacqueline lest she should be chilly.

With a little aid from her, Mr. Edwards fastened it on the oar.

For a while the folds flapped lazily, and he looked anxious; and Claire, as it grew darker, cowered beside him, and made no resistance when he put his arm around her, and drew her closer to his side. But presently the breeze freshened, the sail filled, the skiff felt and obeyed its impulse; and soon the lights twinkling in the fishermen's cottages on the shore below Embridge gladdened the hearts of the weary girl and her preserver.

The moon was rising, and the watchers in the bay had seen by its light the white sail of the skiff, and the direction it was taking.

Around the jutting spur where Jacqueline had signalized herself by losing Claire's shoes, Mr. Travers and his daughters hastened, to be in readiness to greet the dear one so nearly torn from them, and Mr. Edwards heaved a deep sigh.

"They are waiting for you," he murmured. "I can hear their voices. Hark! they are calling to you. But, ere you go, will you not say one kind word to me? To-morrow you will be cold and reserved; you will see in me only the man of many errors, whom you can scarcely resolve whether to pity or to scorn. For this one night—for this one minute—remember, it is all that is left to us!—think of me—speak to me kindly! Let me feel that there are moments in which I am not despicable in your sight!"

"Never that—never!" said Claire, laying her folded hands on his shoulder. "Those only are heroes who have fought and overcome. Be my hero. Even though you go from our quiet cottage into the world, and we never meet again, live such a life that, when I hear you spoken of as a great and good man, I, in my quiet home, may be proud of you, too."

He bent toward her, and their lips met. But there was a loud cry of "Claire, Claire! speak to us!" And she turned from him to answer it, and assure her friends of her safety.

There was great rejoicing over her; but when they would have thanked Mr. Edwards, he had disappeared.

CHAPTER VII. ON HIS TRACK.

As Claire caught no cold, and assured her sisters she felt none the worse for her adventure, Nella and Jacqueline soon settled down to their ordinary tranquillity.

Accustomed to regard their sister as one of the most equable-tempered of girls, it never entered their wise little heads that, in spite of her outward placidity, she might have suffered much mental discomposure from the strain on her nerves.

The one was engrossed in the absent lover, from whom the dictum of his purse-proud friends had separated her; the other was far too much employed in regretting the temporary absence of vivacious, energetic Norman Grey to discover that Claire was restless and ill at ease.

She herself would have found it difficult to account for the suppressed excitement, that made it impossible to read, or draw, or practice as usual, and rendered all her customary occupations distasteful.

She avoided Mr. Edwards, although she could not help knowing that he loitered about the garden, as if to see and speak with her. After that last episode in the boat, how could she meet him without evincing an agitation she felt it her duty to conceal especially from him?

Until he could hold up his head with his fellow-men—until he had expiated the errors of the past, she must not indulge in any warmer feeling for him than pity. So Claire told herself, and was prudent enough to avoid any more dangerous interviews.

And yet she found the confinement of the house intolerable, and longed to escape from it; but not until she had seen Mr. Edwards start on one of his long, solitary walks, did she emerge from her room, and snatch up her garden hat.

But she must have an excuse for wandering away alone, a most unusual thing for Claire to do, and stood in the porch meditating till she remembered having promised herself long since that at the first opportunity she would carry a few odd numbers of illustrated newspapers to the invalid son of a poor woman whose cottage was about a mile and a half from their own, on the road to the market town.

With her roll of pictures in her hand, Claire set forth, sometimes hurrying along, sometimes strolling leisurely, according to the nature of the emotion that influenced her. She was near the by-lane leading up to the cottage, when, at an abrupt turn of the road, two men appeared before her.

They were strangers, and one of them was decidedly unpleasant in his demeanor. He seemed to have been drinking freely, and reeled toward Claire as she would have passed him, with a coarse remark on her pretty face, that made her redden angrily and retreat from him in dismay.

His more civil companion saw her alarm, and, catching him by the arm, dragged him back.

"Be quiet, Andrew. Don't you see that you are frightening the young lady? He does not mean any harm, miss, and we shall be glad if you will direct us to Embridge."

"Thanks," he said, as Claire pointed toward the distant village. "It is not exactly Embridge we want. I suppose there's no harm in mentioning that it's a young gentleman we are in search of, whom we hope to find somewhere in this neighborhood."

Claire could not help starting, and the man rubbed his hands.

"You know him, I can see, and perhaps you can give us the information."

"No, no!" she cried, abruptly. "I have none to give you—none—none!"

And, scarcely knowing what she did, she fled past her questioner, and never stopped till she found herself at the door of the cottage.

It cost her an immense effort to receive and answer the greetings of the sick boy and his mother, for her heart was beating so wildly that she could hardly breathe; and while the poor woman was describing all Johnnie's symptoms, she was thinking of those men.

It was Mr. Edwards they sought, and men of their stamp would not be doing so with any friendly intent. The more respectable of the two was dirty and untidy, and evidently belonged to a class of society many grades below that in which Mr. Edwards appeared to have moved. Oh, it was horrible that these men should have applied to her, of all persons in the world, to tell them where they could pounce upon their prey!

Would they succeed in finding him, in spite of her refusal to answer their questions?

Alas, yes! it was useless to hope to the contrary. As soon as they had found their way to Embridge, and pursued their inquiries there, some one or other would be certain to mention in their hearing that a gentleman answering to the description given was an inmate of the cottage Mr. Travers was occupying. And then—Claire's blood ran cold as she pictured what would inevitably follow—and then these

men would hasten to drag him from his asylum. She would see him arrested and hurried away to London, there to answer for what he had done.

Oh, it was not thus she would have had him expiate his misdeeds! Had he not suffered enough without having to endure public shame? Could nothing be done to prevent his capture?

While Johnnie turned over the engravings and commented upon them, Claire was telling herself that Mr. Edwards must—nay, should—be saved from the danger that threatened him.

Then she rapidly turned over in her mind the best way of effecting it. He had strolled away nearly half an hour before she left home; therefore, those who sought him beneath her father's roof would not find him there.

But he must be cautioned not to return thither so long as his would-be captors were in the neighborhood.

There was no one to do this but herself, and she started from her seat resolved to go in search of him at once.

She had but a very remote idea where he was to be found. For some miles along the coast the ground was rough and uncultivated, and it was toward this wild but beautiful scenery Mr. Edwards generally directed his steps.

Here he could ramble for hours, and rarely meet a living soul, and, knowing this, she hoped that, by climbing an eminence a few hundred yards from the cottage she was visiting, she should be able to discern his tall figure either strolling over the moorland or lying in one of the hollows of the cliff toward which it trended, absorbed in the book that was always his companion.

Bidding the sick boy adieu, and consoling him for her departure by promising to pay him another and longer visit shortly, she turned to depart.

The mother of the child had been called into the outer room some few minutes before, closing behind her the door of communication. As Claire laid her hand on the latch, she heard voices that filled her with dread. Surely one of the speakers was the half-intoxicated man from whom she had so lately fled.

Opening the door cautiously, she glanced into the cottage kitchen. It was as she foreboded. These men had followed her, and she was pent in here, unable to quit the dwelling without being seen by them, and perhaps detained until she should consent to give the information demanded.

She tottered back to the bed, and sunk on the foot of it so pale, so strange in her aspect, that the boy was frightened, and, when she made no reply to his questions, he began to call loudly for his mother to come to his assistance.

But the sound of his voice recalled her fleeting senses. Springing up, she silenced the boy, whose cry his mother, fortunately for Claire, had not heard; but not till she had reassured poor Johnnie, and once more drawn his attention back to his pictures, dared she think of her own position and Mr. Edwards.

Wringing her hands in an agony of grief and terror, she gazed around the room.

Was there no way from it but through the kitchen where those hateful voices were still audible?

No; none, unless—and Claire's hopes revived as her eye fell upon the latticed casement—unless she could contrive to force her slender form through that.

She determined to attempt it; but first the wondering boy, who was again watching her changing features and restless movements, must be bound to silence.

This she effected by frankly avowing that she had been frightened by the men now parleying with his mother, and therefore wished to avoid them.

As soon as Johnnie learned this, he was eager to assist her in her escape, and softly clasped his hands when he saw her climb onto the narrow window ledge, squeeze herself through

the aperture, and look back to nod and smile faintly at him, ere she reclosed the casement.

Once in the garden, she lost no time in running down it, and crossing the bank that divided it from the fields beyond. But she crouched as she ran beside the hedge, lest the white feather in her hat should be descried, and did not venture to pause or look behind till she was a long way from the cottage. Then, and then only, did she make a detour, and direct her steps toward the hill, from which she hoped to see Mr. Edwards.

More than once she fancied that some one was following her—that those voices were borne toward her on the wind—that she could hear the men hoarsely shouting to her to come back; and from behind every tree she passed fearfully looked, expecting to see one or other of them rush forward to intercept her.

So completely did she become the prey of these terrors, that when her skirts were caught by a projecting stump, and her flight received a sudden check, she shrieked and dropped on her knees, covering her face with her hands, for she believed that the men had pursued and overtaken her.

After this alarm it was some minutes before she could tranquillize herself sufficiently to rise. Only the thought of Mr. Edwards and what might befall him if she did not persevere gave her strength for renewed exertion.

Afraid to ascend the hill from the side overlooked by the windows of the cottage just quitted, she had to follow the windings of a weary lane at its foot for more than a mile, but at last felt that she might safely strike into a track that would lead her to the point from which she hoped and expected to catch sight of the person she was seeking.

But when, breathless and panting, Claire stood on the hill-top and scanned the surrounding country, she could see naught but the silent moorland, the sea lying far below her, and the wild birds that came fluttering and screaming from their nests in the cliffs.

Whither could Mr. Edwards have wandered? She shaded her eyes, and gazed again and yet again in every direction. This was the route he had taken, she felt positive of it, and yet failed to discern him. There was one path from the moorland to the shore by which he might have descended the cliffs, purposing to return home along the beach. In this case she was but losing time by lingering where she was.

He must be apprised of these men being in search of him before they could find their way to her father's dwelling; and Claire ran down the hill, on the side nearest her home, to make her way there with as little delay as possible.

The sun had now risen to its fullest height, and its rays beat down upon her head till it ached and throbbed intolerably. But still Claire plodded on, till, coming along a lane just in front of her, she beheld Mr. Edwards.

He must have been to call upon his *protegee*, the poor widow, taking quite another direction to the one in which she had sought him; and he strode on, neither looking to the right nor the left, with his hat drawn down over his eyes, wholly unconscious that Claire was so near him.

She was crossing some fields—he was traversing the lane; and at the time she first saw him, only the hedge and a high bank separated them; but when she timidly uttered his name he did not hear her faint accents; and when she called again, his swift steps had already carried him out of hearing.

Claire could have thrown herself down on the ground, and wept, but it would not do to think of herself. She must not pause, must not rest, until she had overtaken Mr. Edwards, and told him that the avengers were on his track.

And now she has nearly reached the last stile. Not two hundred yards away is the gate of the pretty cottage where her family are residing. She can see her father strolling among the flower-beds, and Mr. Edwards quickening his pace to join him, and enter upon one of the scholarly discussions both enjoy.

Alas! that she must break in upon them with tidings of such direful import!

Claire's foot is on the stile, when a sound in the lane makes her pause and glance fearfully toward it. Those dreadful men, their foot-falls unheard on the loose, sandy soil, are there. They have seen Mr. Edwards—they are following him. Even if she could outstrip them, which she knows to be impossible, it would be useless; they would suspect her design, and in her very presence the arrest would be made.

The unhappy Claire could go no further, and sat down on the step of the stile, leaning her head against the rails, completely prostrated both in mind and body.

"I would have saved him, but could not—could not!" she moaned. "Oh, Heaven! be pitiful to him—be pitiful!"

From where she sat she saw Mr. Edwards enter the house. Did he see who was coming, and was it to avoid them? If so, of what avail would it be? He could no longer hope to escape them. He was lost—lost!

For a while her sight was misty—she could not discern anything; but when it grew clearer she clutched the bar of the stile, and clung to it in her anguish. The men had entered the garden. They were interrogating her father, angrily, it seemed, for one of them was gesticulating while he talked, and Mr. Travers retreated from him.

Were they demanding their prisoner?

Then Claire suddenly felt that she must see him once more; that it would be unwomanly to stand aloof while he was being dragged away to prison. She had bidden him look forward and hope—she would do so again. He should carry with him one gleam of comfort, to keep the penitent from sinking into despair.

But as she trailed her nerveless limbs toward home, she saw the men turn from the cottage door, and take the road to the village. What did this mean? Had her father prevailed on them to delay the arrest?—had he answered for Mr. Edwards's appearance when called upon?

She hurried toward him; but he was looking after the retreating men, and did not notice her till she caught hold of his arm.

"Those men?" she gasped—"those men?"

"One of them has been drinking; the other is shrewd and civil. He has invented a life-boat, and, it seems, contrived to interest Mr. Grey in it when showing him over some portion of the dockyard in which this inventor is a workman; so has taken advantage of a holiday to come down here and see Grey about it."

Then it was not Mr. Edwards they sought, after all, and her fears had been groundless.

Claire laughed hysterically, to her father's astonishment, and then surprised him still more by slipping down at his feet in a swoon.

CHAPTER VIII.

NORMAN GREY BECOMES SUSPICIOUS.

WITHOUT being absolutely ill, Claire was languid, and unable to leave her room for some days after this attack. Her friends attributed it to her having walked too far in the heat of the sun, and she did not attempt to undeceive them.

Mr. Edwards had planned to depart on the day after her illness commenced, but could not resolve to go until she was quite herself again, and even then lingered, as if he found it difficult to tear himself away.

Claire had fallen into a reverie of which he was the object, as she sauntered one evening, the first time after her recovery, along the shores of the bay. She had gone down there to meet Nella and Jacqueline, who had been out in the skiff with Norman Grey, who had desired that his return should be commemorated by a water party.

But, even after they had landed, the young people loitered on the sands, loth to separate; and Claire sat on a stone at no great distance, dreaming her own dreams, until she was awakened from them by the merry laughter and exclamations of Jacqueline.

She was sportively lecturing Norman Grey,

who, with heightened color, was gravely defending himself.

"I don't think it was such a very absurd mistake after all," he was saying. "I appeal to you, Miss Travers;" but Nella had moved away. "I appeal to you, Miss Claire; was it so very absurd?"

"Don't be drawn into the discussion, Clary," cried merry Jacqueline. "Mr. Grey ought to know by this time that it's high treason to appeal against any of my decisions. It's as bad as contradicting me, which I never could endure from my babyhood."

"Very well," said Norman, recovering his good humor; "then I'll confess that I have been very ridiculous, and throw myself on the mercy of my judge. Punish me lightly, most potent one, or not at all."

"What shall his sentence be?" asked Jacqueline. "Shall I banish him outright? Somebody suggest something, please?"

"I do not know what you have been disputing about," averred Claire, to whom she was looking for a reply.

"That's an odious word, Miss Travers," Norman interposed. "No one could quarrel with your sister."

"Very true," said Jacqueline, with mock gravity. "The sweetness of my temper, or else my doing all the talking myself, renders it impossible. Go on, Mr. Grey. The last remark was very prettily made."

"The fact is," Norman explained, "I could not help knowing for some time past that you have a person—an invalid, I mean—residing with you; and as I had—rather stupidly, it appears—come to the conclusion that this Mr. Edwards was not quite—quite—"

And here he paused, and looked confused.

"The fact is," said Jacqueline, saucily mimicking him, "Mr. Grey—rather stupidly, as he observes—had decided that Mr. Edwards is a lunatic, and that papa acts as his keeper. And, listen, Nella—listen, Claire—I should not have found it out if he had not commiserated us, and wondered whether I should be able to keep up my spirits when the cold weather has set in, and we are boxed up in the cottage with our mad friend!"

"Mr. Edwards is not the liveliest of companions, I must admit," said Nella, earnestly, "and certainly is peculiar; but I think, I hope, his mind is not affected. I do not believe that I could stay in the house with him if that were the case; what do you say, Claire?"

"That he will leave us shortly, and so we need not waste our time in discussing him," was the prompt reply.

But though Claire made strenuous efforts to introduce another topic of conversation, she could not silence Jacqueline, who when she had done teasing Norman Grey for his mistake, amused herself by describing Mr. Edwards's arrival at the cottage.

"And he came quite unexpectedly!" Claire heard the attentive auditor exclaim. "You had never seen him till then? Sane or not sane, this Mr. Edwards appears to be a very mysterious personage."

"He is, indeed!" replied Jacqueline, whose eye her sister vainly endeavored to catch. "I think it is doubtful whether his name is Edwards, after all, for at first papa called him Richards, and will not answer any questions about him."

"Aren't you chattering too fast, Jack?" queried Nella, who now began to divine from Claire's troubled face that something was wrong. "When papa told us that he had agreed to shelter Mr. Edwards, for a little while, because that gentleman was ill or in some difficulty, he did not intend us to talk about it."

"I'm always doing something I ought not to do!" said Jacqueline, penitently. "But, after all, this does not signify; we know we can rely on Mr. Grey's discretion."

Mr. Grey bowed, but did not speak—he had fallen into a brown study and Jacqueline astonished her sisters, after they had parted with him, by bursting into tears.

"Why did you not check me sooner?" she demanded. "You must have seen that Mr. Grey was marvelling how I could make a jest of poor Mr. Edwards's misfortunes. He will set me down as heartless—absolutely heartless!"

"But we know that you are not!" cried Nella, to console her.

But Jacqueline could not still her self-reproaches; and when two or three days passed away, and Norman Grey did not pay his customary visit, her eyes were so swollen, that even Mr. Travers remarked upon them, and hoped she had not been catching cold.

Claire began to dread she knew not what, and her heart almost ceased to beat when Mrs. Lane, coming home from a shopping excursion to the village, drew her aside to say mysteriously that their guest ought to be warned that there were inquiries being made about him. Claire ran up-stairs to her own room to calm herself.

Her father, alas! had gone to see an old friend, the incumbent of a neighboring parish, and would not return till the evening; while Mr. Edwards himself was away on one of his long rambles.

Not knowing what else to do, she penciled a little note, and carried it to his room, laying it where it must catch his eye as soon as he entered.

"You must fly," Claire wrote. "You are no longer safe here. Those who are investigating the mystery of Lord Chalfont's disappearance are at Embridge seeking you."

Then she had hesitated whether to add a kindly word from herself, and eventually the note ended thus:

"May Heaven keep and strengthen you in your good resolutions! I will remember you always in my prayers!"

Claire took a little sprig of myrtle out of the bosom of her dress—was it not an emblem of hope?—laid it with the note, and then tried to go about her duties as usual. But her hands trembled, her color came and went, and she found herself listening to every sound.

She heard Mr. Edwards enter the house, and go to his room. Would he not take her advice, and hurry away with all possible speed? But no; she heard him pacing to and fro for some time, and then all was still. Had he been seized with a desire to prove his repentance by awaiting the coming of the officers of justice, and give himself up to them?

Would Mr. Travers ever come?

Ah! here he was at last! But he was hungry. The lamp must be lit, a meat tea set before him, and all the details of his interview with his friend listened to before he could be taken aside to hear the tale of Mr. Edwards's danger.

Ay; and just as he leaned back in his chair, smilingly assuring his daughters that he had had enough, a step—was it the step Claire dreaded to hear?—came past the window.

"Visitors at this hour!" said Mr. Travers, cheerfully. "We are getting quite gay! Open the door, Nella, love, and see who it is."

"It is Mr. Grey, papa!"

And Jacqueline, her smiles returning, sprung from her seat.

But the young man did not appear to see her outstretched hand. He looked grave—nay, stern; and Claire clutched at the back of her father's chair for support, for, as soon as he began to speak, she knew that her fears were realized.

"It may seem ungenerous, Mr. Travers, after enjoying your friendship and your hospitality, to come here on such an errand as my present one; but it is my duty and I cannot shirk it."

"I don't understand," said Mr. Travers, looking from one to the other of his daughters in his perplexity.

"I am told," Norman went on, hoarsely and rapidly, "that in the kindness of your heart you have given an asylum to a person who, by some specious tale, has induced you to think him deserving your compassion. Don't imagine that I availed myself of your hospitality to pry into your affairs. I never thought

of Mr. Edwards but as a harmless lunatic till a day or two since; nor would anything I then heard," he hastened to add, as he caught the sound of Jacqueline's smothered exclamation of distress, "have aroused my suspicions if I had not received a few hours earlier a note from a friend in London, telling me that the scoundrel who had robbed, and perhaps, too, murdered, my unfortunate cousin has been seen in this neighborhood."

Was Claire fainting? No; although every vestige of color had left her face, making it contrast strangely with the glowing, eager countenances of her sisters, she kept her post behind her father's chair, silent and rigid.

"I am listening very attentively," Mr. Travers observed; "but cannot follow you. It appears to me that you are making some kind of apology for doing your duty, and yet, Mr. Grey, doing our duty never requires excuse."

"Don't you see that it compels me to bring trouble and notoriety upon your quiet, happy household?" cried Norman, in great agitation.

"Can you not understand how I am obliged to suspect that the man you have sometimes called Richards, sometimes Edwards, and who lives here secluded, is none other than the villain Richardson?"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Travers, rising from his chair. "Why—what—how came you to think this? Does any one else know of your suspicions? Then you have come to tell me that you consider it your duty to hand him over to the police?"

"Yes," replied Norman, firmly. "Every day fresh proofs of his evil conduct are cropping up—checks that he has forged in poor Chalfont's name—jewelry that he has obtained by pledging Chalfont's credit; and shall he escape just punishment for the most shameful deeds ever done under the mask of friendship?"

"But Lord Chalfont—does he sanction this arrest?" Mr. Travers demurred.

"Is he still living?" asked Norman, excitedly. "For some time past I have been tempted to believe that the letters his solicitors have received purporting to come from him are forgeries, like the rest; and that they are sent to keep us quiet till Richardson has safely evaded justice."

"You are wrong in this surmise," Mr. Travers assured him. "Lord Chalfont is not dead."

"Then where is he?" asked his hearer, incredulously.

"I am here, cousin!"

And Mr. Edwards, who had been standing at the door unobserved for some minutes, came forward, and put his hand in Norman Grey's.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EARL.

"It is all so strange, so inexplicable," said Norman, when he had cordially greeted the Earl, "that I am quite in a maze. Then it is you who have been Mr. Travers's guest all these weeks?"

"Yes; he generously brought me here, that I might have the benefit of his skill; and when he had cured me I still stayed on, because—"

Lord Chalfont paused, reddened, and glanced at Claire, who was still pale and trembling with emotion.

"You might have let me into your secret," his cousin told him, reproachfully.

"I should have done so if—" He hesitated a moment, and then, taking courage from Claire's emotion, boldly went on,—"if I had not been seized with a jealous fear that the same motive that kept me here was influencing you also."

Norman saw the direction of his eyes, and smiled. He admired Claire, but did not think her half so bewitching as one of her sisters.

"But why," he asked, "have we been allowed to think you dead?"

"That I am not I owe to Mr. Travers, to whom I am indebted, not only for my life, but my reason."

And the Earl gratefully and respectfully took the hand of his host; who, though re-

pudiating the idea of any obligation, was affected by the action.

"If Miss Travers and her sister will consent that I shall explain, I will be as brief as possible," his lordship went on, addressing the whole party, but still looking at Claire.

Every one was eager and interested; so, with an effort, he began:

"I need not tell you that I was deceived in my college friend Richardson. It seems to be pretty generally known that he played the traitor from the commencement of our acquaintance, and that I was shamefully, cruelly duped. When I did get an insight into his true character, my indignant reproaches induced him to assail me; but I could not forget that he had been my friend, and that my own weakness might have led him into acts he would not otherwise have committed. I, therefore, appointed a meeting, intending to offer him the means of quitting England, and living a better life in another country. We met; but when I found that he was attempting to regain his old ascendancy over me, and endeavoring to evade the promise to leave England that I would have exacted, I refused to let him have the notes I had brought for him. What followed Mr. Travers can tell you better than I, for some lucky chance brought him to the spot just then. I only know that Richardson tried to snatch the pocket book from me, that we struggled for it desperately, and that then all was a blank."

"Don't call it chance—it was Providence led me there!" Mr. Travers gravely observed, "for I was in time to see Lord Chalfont struck down by a blow on the head, so violent that it rendered him insensible; and when my cares had partially revived him, he talked so incoherently that I could not learn who he was. Had I met a policeman, I should have taken counsel with him; but as I did not, I led my charge to my own apartments, at a quiet hotel in the Adelphi, where he was supposed to be my son, and there exercised the professional skill I still retain in his behalf."

"No one could have been kinder, or more clever at healing my hurts, both mental and bodily!" the Earl exclaimed, warmly. "Pain, shame that I should have been so credulous, and resentment at the treatment I have received, made me little better than a madman, and left me at last so weak, so miserable, that I do not know what would have been the result if Mr. Travers had not been at my elbow!"

"The case was simple enough. Concussion of the brain, from the blow, complicated by intense excitement that threatened to terminate in fever. When I learned the rank of my patient, I proposed handing him over to the family physician, but he would not hear of it; and as he was in no condition to be contradicted, I let him have his own way."

"Yes; and consented to bring me here that I might be perfectly quiet till my mind had taken a healthier tone, which, I am thankful to say, it is rapidly doing! I have made at the commencement of my career some serious, but not fatal, mistakes. I have been weak enough to suffer myself to be drawn into excesses and follies that I loathed even then, and now look back upon with disgust; but I am beginning to see that the ordeal through which I have passed may make me a wiser, if a sadder, man."

"Still it puzzles me why you have permitted us to think that you were no more?" Norman cried.

"My dear fellow, I felt too ill for some time to trouble myself about anything, though as soon as I learned that there was a hue and cry for me, I wrote to my solicitors assuring them that I was still in the flesh; but as Richardson made off on the appearance of Mr. Travers, and did not know whether he had left me living or dead, I had no objection to keeping him in suspense as to what had become of me."

"Of course, he has deserved all the terror he must have been enduring; but you will not let him escape punishment?"

"I might not have done so, for I was very wroth when I discovered, through a newspaper

report Miss Jacqueline read in my hearing, that he has been audacious enough quite lately to forge my name; but the affair is taken out of my hands. He has been arrested for a crime committed under the *alias* of Morson, and without any interference on my part will have to expiate his misdeeds in penal servitude."

"Papa," said Claire, hurrying after Mr. Travers when he stepped away to his study, leaving his daughters and Norman Grey shaking hands with and congratulating the young Earl, "you have strangely misled me. Why did you do so?"

Mr. Travers looked astonished at the charge.

"My dear child, I cannot accuse myself of doing anything of the kind! It was Lord Chalfont's own suggestion that he should be known while he was here by his Christian names, Harold Edward, and so I introduced him to you as Mr. Edwards."

"Sometimes you called him Richards."

"Inadvertently, then, my dear; and only because the name of his lordship's false friend was often in my thoughts just then."

"But it misled me," Claire persisted.

"And yet, Clary, you hinted to me on one occasion that you had divined all that I had concealed from you about our guest."

"Yes; because I believed him to be the Mr. Richardson flying from the consequences of his crime. How could I dream that our guest was the Earl, when everything you said led me to quite another conclusion? And, papa, do you forget how carefully you warned me against any intimacy, as if you knew Mr. Edwards to be so hardened in sin that he was no fitting associate for your daughters?"

"I never meant to imply any such thing," her father assured her. "I have always pitied and admired Lord Chalfont for the tenderness of conscience that has made him exaggerate his own faults. I believe him to be a very fine young fellow."

"But still you *did* warn us to avoid him," Claire persisted; and Mr. Travers was slightly embarrassed; but he drew her toward him, and kissed her forehead.

"Yes, love, I remember that I did; but it was because we are poor, and I felt that my Claire was too good and sweet to be exposed to the risk of losing her heart to one so much above her in rank. However, Lord Chalfont has had something to say to me on this subject, and here he comes to discuss it with you."

"Don't go, papa," entreated the blushing girl, as the Earl came forward eagerly; but Mr. Travers went away, telling her to give his lordship a patient hearing.

"Am I over bold in asserting that you liked me a little, Claire," Lord Chalfont murmured, "even when you thought me a disgraced man? Will you try and love me now that I am doing my utmost to be worthy of you?"

Claire's head drooped, and she was silent.

"Look up, sweet one, and answer me. Have you not guessed that it was to be near you I stayed here so long? Or if you think that I should submit to a probation before you consent to be mine, I will obey you."

"Yes," said Claire, finding her voice at last; "it will be more prudent for you to go away. Just now your gratitude to papa may lead you to think too highly of his daughter."

"Claire, I love you with all my heart and soul. Be your own sweet self, and say, frankly, generously, 'Harold, I will trust you.' On my life I will not prove undeserving the rich treasure of your affection."

And Claire, after a little modest hesitation, whispered the words for which he asked.

"She will be a lovely Countess," said Jacqueline, rapturously, waltzing round her sister; "and her nuptials shall be a model of elegant simplicity. I mean to arrange all the details myself. We'll have no satin, no diamonds—those shall be reserved till 'my lady' goes to Court; and yet our Claire, in her spotless white, shall be one of the prettiest, best dressed brides that ever knelt at the altar."

"Mr. Grey's sisters are to be two of the

bridesmaids," said Nella; "and then there will be you and I—"

But here Jacqueline, laughing and blushing, put a finger on her lips.

"You must leave Jack Travers out of your arrangements, for she has just been made the victim of a shocking conspiracy. Lord Chalfont and Norman have plotted a double wedding, and I have been worried into consenting to be the other bride, if my dear papa has no objection."

"And 'we three' are to be parted at last!" was the sighing comment.

"Oh, poor Nella!" exclaimed both the brides elect, as they tearfully embraced their less fortunate sister; asking themselves the while how they could have been so selfishly engrossed in their own happiness as to forget her troubles.

But Nella played the heroine for once, and wiped away her tears.

"Indeed," she told them, "you shall neither put off your weddings nor be sad on my account. Everything's for the best, as Claire is fond of telling us; and on this occasion I am quite willing to agree with her; for think, dear girls, how could we all leave papa? It shall be my task to comfort him for losing you. Hitherto I have been very selfish; now I shall be more considerate for others, and try to be happy myself in witnessing and ministering to the felicity of my very dear sisters."

And Nella was not long without her reward. As soon as Lord Chalfont discovered that the reverse in Mr. Travers's circumstances had separated her from her betrothed, he set to work to remedy it. In the course of a few weeks, Mr. Travers was nominated to a berth under Government, for which his literary attainments rendered him well fitted; and the Eversleys, on hearing that he was no longer poor and obscure, withdrew their refusal to let their son wed his daughter.

"Of course, papa will have to live in London now," Jacqueline observed, "and the cottage will be deserted; but Claire, Nella, we will never forget neither the sad nor the happy hours we have spent within its walls; and, in the years to come, let us still try and meet there sometimes, and ask ourselves if we are doing our best to deserve the blessings that have been showered upon us and those whom we love."

A compact to which Nella and Claire gave a ready assent, and which, be it added, they intend to observe.

It was not till Mr. Travers was comfortably settled in town among his old friends, with a cheerful elderly spinster cousin to preside over his domestic arrangements, that either of his daughters consented to leave him. The Eversleys took up their abode at no great distance, but Norman installed Jacqueline at his north country home, and Lord Chalfont carried his bride abroad for their honeymoon, which they prolonged till brought home by business that could no longer be set aside, even for the gratification of watching Claire's delight at the lovely scenery to which her happy bridegroom had introduced her.

Halting one night, as they traveled homeward, at a Belgian town, they heard so much from their gossiping host of the beauty of one of the churches that they delayed their journey on the morrow in order to inspect it.

As they drew near the edifice, a tall, graceful woman, in the quaint garb of a religious order, emerged from an orphanage, and would have glided by, but her eyes fell on the Earl, and, with a start, she paused.

At the same moment he recognized her, and uttered her name—"Miss Richardson!"

Bowing slightly, he would have passed on. He had never named, even to Claire, the bitterest drop in the cup he had drunk at the hands of his false friend. He had never told him that it had humiliated him more than all else when he discovered that Henry Richardson and his sister had plotted to inveigle him into a marriage with the latter. To know that you have been the dupe of those in whose good faith you had testified unbounded confi-

dence is terribly galling, and Lord Chalfont colored high as he drew his wondering bride forward. But he had a generous and chivalrous nature, and the next moment had turned back, and was accosting her.

"Miss Richardson, if you are here alone, and need a friend, Lady Chalfont will, I am sure, be that friend."

"I thank you," she murmured; "but need nothing. My brother is dead—the news reached me a few days since—and I have found employment. You have atoned for the follies of your past, and are happy. I am expiating the sins of my life, and am resigned."

There was a cloud on the faces of the young couple as they listened; but it vanished as they went away secure in their own well-founded happiness. In spite of much morbid sentiment, this world is in a great measure what we ourselves make it; and though sorrows will come to all, they will never press so heavily on the pure-hearted as the willfully erring; and where shall we find men leading nobler, better lives than Harold Chalfont and Norman Grey, or sweeter matrons than the fair women who were erstwhile "Nut-brown Maidens?"

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